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"HE LOVES ANOTHER—ANOTHER," HER VOICE SINKING ALMOST TO A WHISPER, AND, WITH A GESTURE OF REPUDIATION SHE MOVED TOWARD THE DOOR.

The Wife's Secret; or, 'Twixt Cup and Lip.

BY COL. JUAN LEWIS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRIDE THAT WAS TO BE.

"TWIXT cup and lip there is many a slip," you know, Mrs. Alpine." "Quite possible, Mr. Bookout, but the adage is hardly applicable to Iola's marriage. The day was named a year ago, and though the groom has been delayed in reaching home, all is settled and it must go on. Your quotation is ill-timed."

"Nevertheless, I wish the wedding could have been postponed," was the response in so grave a tone that the fashionable lady started and drew herself proudly up with a glance of alarm.

The scene was the luxuriant drawing-room of an elegant residence at Washington Heights, and the lady was mistress of the mansion, and the gentleman her trusted adviser and friend.

"If there were any reasons, Mr. Bookout?" she said slowly after a moment's silence, while the color faded from her cheeks.

"If there are reasons," he responded, but with special emphasis, "it is too late to urge them now. Still, as we know, Mrs. Alpine, the happiness of a life should never be left to any possible shock! Pardon and forgive my quotation. Ah, here comes Mr. Alpine."

The lady turned away the steady gaze with which she had apparently

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sought a deeper meaning, and with a slight gesture of her shapely hand accepted his apologetic bow.

A stately gentleman of fifty-seven, with an air of mastership almost pompous—who had been in consultation with a woman wearing a bunch of housekeeper's keys at her girdle, at the further end of the long apartment—rapidly came forward with extended hand and pleasant words of greeting.

"What is that I hear about quotations?" he questioned. "But I beg you will not repeat, whatever it may have been. Bookout's attempts in that direction, my dear"—turning to the lady—"always partake of the nature of the law. Forbear, my friend. As well might the Sphinx attempt to joke."

The legal gentleman bowed with entire tranquility of manner, as if he had long ago learned to be tolerant of his friend's opinion.

Not a thin, spare man like his host—but strong of limb and broad of shoulders—with deep-set eyes, under overhanging brows; he looked like one deep in family secrets—one who could analyze human passions and weakness very much as an experienced surgeon does the human cadaver.

"But I am glad you came thus early," continued Mr. Alpine, shaking hands for the second time with his visitor. "It will be an hour yet before the ceremony comes off. Come back into the library. I have received a letter, and a proposal concerning a guardianship, and an old marsh property on the Jersey coast"—in a lower tone—"which you must hear. I see you are looking for Iola, but the young thing is doubtless busy with the wonderful mysteries of her bridal toilet. Come! Mrs. Alpine will excuse us, I am sure!"

"Most certainly," assented the lady, turning toward them from the table, where she had paused for a moment trifling with the rich profusion of flowers it displayed—as if no thought of weightier import than the selection of a rose, or the choice of a perfume, had ever troubled the even tenor of her fashionable existence.

There was no trace now on her handsome features of that sudden paleness—no alarm in the brilliant eyes as she looked from her husband to his friend. A lady of forty-three or four, but looking much younger—attired in perfect taste.

The gentlemen bowed to her in temporary adieu, and Mr. Alpine kissed the fair hand she extended.

She watched them calmly—still toying with her flowers as they slowly withdrew, talking as they went; outwardly smiling until the door closed behind them, when an instant change succeeded, and she began to walk nervously to and fro.

"The Sphinx," she repeated, recalling the remark of her husband in speaking of his friend,— "even so! I have always dreaded him and his shadowy subtleties. Strange how strongly he has bound himself to Mr. Alpine! Even my influence would fail, in the absence of an assigned motive, to counteract his power. But what, after all these years, have I to fear? Let me look a moment at the reflection in the mirror of that darkest episode of the past and nerve myself. For, what will come—may come."

She sank into a large easy-chair and remained for some moments with her clouded features hidden in soft folds of filmy lace.

The dusky shadows of the coming night rapidly gathered around her and at length recalled her wandering thoughts to the ceremony to which her husband had alluded.

"Dear girl," she breathed, "so young—so innocent! Oh, may she be happy in the love she has chosen! And if the memory of parental wretchedness finds compensation in the joy of children, then may she—may both—be doubly blessed for the happiness denied me! But hush! Not even the walls must hear my sighs. Be mute, my heart, as when torture-torn of old."

A moment later and the housekeeper again appeared, a tall angular woman, severe of face and resolute of voice—preceding a servant, who, under her instructions, speedily threw a brilliant flood of light on the scene from the massive chandeliers—bringing out the rich tints and harmonious coloring of the furnishing and adornment, with almost magical effect. As the housekeeper was following the servant out the lady called her:

"Mrs. Wigsmith—one moment! Where is Iola—Miss Marl?"

Before the question could be answered there was a rustling outside—a rush of eager footsteps—and a young girl, fair as a summer sky, beautiful as a dream of Eden, in her bridal robes, came hurrying in and threw herself at Mrs. Alpine's feet.

"Dear mamma—that is to be!" she cried in accents of enchanting sweetness. "I could not resist the desire of my heart, that you, you alone should be first to see me dressed as—as—"

"As a bride!" interposed Mrs. Alpine, encouragingly, as the girl faltered at the word. "My darling, why should you hesitate at the name? The synonym of happiness, of trust, of love—the estate that comes to no woman in its perfect fullness but once! Surely, my Iola is happy?"

"Surely! Yet now that it is so near I tremble and doubt as if I did not know that nothing could mar the happiness I have staked upon it. Foolish, dear mamma, I know—and wicked against Edward, too—but, indeed, indeed, the bright anticipations of the hour have been half hidden and obscured by fears and doubts I cannot define or banish! Pity me, pity me! for a wayward thing."

The handsome head with its luxuriant wealth of nut-brown hair, was gathered in an instant to the sympathetic, matronly bosom, and the round, fair arms went soothingly and protectingly around the young girl in a loving embrace.

"Iola! Nay, look up! Do not fear to meet my gaze. You love Edward Alpine?"

"Indeed—indeed, how could it be otherwise?" cried the girl. "But you know he has been abroad more than a year, and suppose—suppose he should have seen some one he likes better?"

Mrs. Alpine locked a little startled at the suggestion.

"I cannot suppose anything of the kind," she declared, firmly. "His letters have been regular, have explained his prolonged absence, and always expressed his devotion to you. Banish your doubts, my dear, if they are doubts. Edward arrived at a late hour yesterday, as you know, and Mr. Alpine's anxiety ended in determining that the wedding should take place as previously intended. He expects the young man every minute. Everything is arranged. The few old family friends who are to be present are now assembling; the reverend clergyman has arrived, and is even now waiting in his robes of office; and, my darling, all doubting fears are traitors to true happiness! Hush! Yonder comes Mr. Bookout, followed by Edward's father."

She lifted her to her feet as she spoke, and standing thus, with arms entwined together, the two presented an attractive picture.

Mr. Alpine appeared to think so, too, for he paused irresolutely and thrust a letter which he carried in his hand—with some apparent purpose of appealing to his wife—quietly out of sight.

"How much alike they are," commented Mr. Bookout, watching the effect of his words; "like an elder and younger sister."

"Yes—though I never noticed it before. Yes—like mother and daughter, rather. But come! Our congratulations are first in order, I know," he added, with proud satisfaction, advancing to the ladies.

"Ned ought to see you thus," he continued, addressing them. "The young scion of a noble house loses much by not coming home earlier. But never mind! He will make amends for it when he does come. His wandering days are mostly over, we may be sure. Mistress Iola will soon anchor the lad in quieter moorings. In brief, the new leaf he has been always talking of turning will be turned at last."

Mr. Bookout, lingering a little in the background and hearing all these indications of pleasing anticipations, looked from one to the other with his hand upon his chin, while for a single instant a fleeting expression akin to commiseration was distinctly visible as his glance rested on the young girl.

At that moment the sound of wheels rapidly driven came to their ears.

CHAPTER II.

A SINISTER MESSENGER.

THERE was a breathless silence, which ended with the sound of approaching steps.

"Ned, at last!" declared Mr. Alpine, rejoicingly, advancing with rather more haste than his usually stately manner warranted, and clasping his wife's jeweled fingers expectantly.

"Our Ned, at last!" he repeated, and with a gesture toward the adjoining parlors the sliding doors rolled backward, revealing the assembled guests and the clergyman in waiting.

Mr. Bookout at the same instant seized Iola's hand, drawing her a little to one side, while all turned toward the entrance.

The hall-door was flung open, and a young man advanced into the stronger light.

He was very pale, and shook with haste and agitation.

Mr. Alpine recoiled in undefined alarm, but the lawyer appeared to recognize the stranger.

"Douglas Owen?" he said, in a tone half surprise and half assertion.

"Yes, sir—yes. Mr. Alpine"—he looked from one to the other—"your son, who was to have been married—"

"Good Heaven!" interrupted Mr. Alpine, with a sudden outburst. "He is dead!"

His voice rung thrillingly through the room.

Douglas Owen shivered from head to foot like one who has just taken his first plunge into an ice-cold bath, and then his color rose like a fever flush.

"Sir," he cried, "and madame, and you," he bowed low and his voice sunk as he looked at the young girl—"Edward Alpine is not dead! He is not even ill."

"Not ill?" thundered the courtly old gentleman, as voice and manner completely changed, and his face crimsoned with wrath and shame. "Not ill! not dead! I would he were!" he added bitterly as the young girl in her bridal robes fell, half-fainting into Mrs. Alpine's arms.

"Awry, sir; you have done your worst—we need no explanations"—as Owen was about to speak. "Tell him that he is no longer my son—though she"—he looked at Iola—"shall be our daughter. Go!" he added in a milder tone.

The young man still hesitated and glanced at Iola as if he would speak to her, but a look at Mr. Bookout, who was watching him steadily, caused him to yield this scarce apparent purpose, and hastily withdraw.

The lawyer quickly followed him and overtook him in the hall.

There was no surprise in his tones or gesture at the information brought—no apparent desire for particulars. He only asked—"Where is this sower of wild oats, Owen?"

"Going abroad again, sir; he declared his intention of doing so at once, after reading your letter. He was despondent and desperate."

"Ay? ay?" mused Mr. Bookout, caressing his chin and reflectively weighing the information. "He sent no message, Owen?"

"No, sir. I was to say what I chose. He would not, he declared, add the insult of an apology."

The lawyer nodded.

"I recognize the spirit of that declaration," he said imperturbably. "Desperate? I think you said, Owen? Let events take their course. All the better for the hopes you have been entertaining," with a glance like the sudden thrust of a knife.

The young man flushed and his gaze reverted toward the room he had just left, with a passionate gleam.

"But entertained with your approval, Mr. Bookout, you know," he asserted.

"Hum! Possibly—so long as you are guided by me. Yet be cautious how you even look—much less express any feeling you may entertain. Remember!—no advance toward her until you receive the permission from me."

The young man's hands clinched fiercely together, and for a moment there was a struggle for repression visible in his dark face.

"I shall remember," he declared in a voice scarcely above a whisper, and a repetition of the backward glance at the parlor, with the passionate gleam in his eyes.

He started abruptly, and Mr. Bookout also fell back and began moving away, for the door opened and Iola, glancing into the hall, came hurriedly out.

There were traces of tears upon her cheeks—of wounded pride—of personal regret—of disappointment for others; but she bore herself proudly.

From a timid, shrinking girl, fearing to meet the fate chosen for her, she seemed to have suddenly changed to a brave, self-reliant, womanly woman—capable of confronting the worst that could befall.

The dark passion-haunted features of the young man glowed as he looked at her.

"I am glad to find you still here," she said, simply; "for I have a message to send to—to him." She paused a moment to gather voice, which had faltered a little, and drew from her fore-finger a ring—the engagement ring.

"Take this," she said, "and when placing it in his hand say that whatever my personal regrets might have been they are swallowed up in fervent wishes for his happiness. I feel that he loves another—and I—I could not take a divided heart."

Glancing sharply about him, Owen saw that Mr. Bookout, with his hands behind him, was withdrawing toward the lower end of the hall.

"You believe, then, that love is beyond our control?" he asked, with strange eagerness.

The luminous eyes of the young girl opened widely with apparent surprise at the intensity of his tone and manner as he asked the question.

"In part—yes!" she responded, gathering her soft draperies about her to leave him.

There was a sound of feet from the open doorway, and the old lawyer looked around and returned toward them.

Douglas Owen drew back, and the glow of passion dropped out of his face, leaving it darkly white.

"Owen," said Mr. Bookout, rubbing his hands together, "I see there is a moon to-night, so that your ride down-town cannot fail to be attractive. If I was sure that I should find this wretched young man, Ned Alpine, still at his hotel"—with a demonstration of sudden anger, and a gesture toward the city—"I would go with you, Mr. Owen. Good-night, sir, and a pleasant journey. The road to town is smooth and safe—quite as safe as this hallway, or I should add, 'Be care-free'."

He slowly uttered the last words looking backward, in a tone quite ordinary, but with a meaning that the young man did not mistake.

He had already drawn the young girl's hand through his arm and was moving toward the drawing room.

She was silent, but her mind had suddenly become active; the lawyer's last words had given her an inspiration.

An inspiration to be followed by immediate action, and a wild, unreasoning hope began to rise in her heart.

CHAPTER III.

THE RECREANT LOVER.

It was at the close of that early summer day.

A young man came hurriedly out of a gunsmith's shop on Broadway, thrusting something he had just purchased into his breast with a half-furtive, half-impatient movement, and, glancing up and down, strode rapidly away.

In a moment he had reached the corner and was in the act of crossing, but sprung back to avoid a passing carriage, in doing which he lost his footing, and, striving to save himself, fell heavily, his head striking the curb.

There was a slight cry from within the carriage, and a handsome woman's face looked out, with a glance of apprehension and a word to the driver, instantly succeeded by a gesture of recognition.

The driver sprung down from the box, while the lady impulsively threw open the door.

"I know the gentleman," she said to the policeman and the crowd which instantly gathered. "He is hurt. Lift him into the carriage."

"Not so serious as that," responded the young man, rallying with a great effort, but looking very pale and confused.

"No apology, Mr. Alpine," said the lady. "Surely you remember me—your late fellow passenger on the steamer," speaking rapidly. "I am stopping at the same hotel as yourself. Let me take you there."

Edward Alpine still hesitated, and apparently would have refused, but yielded to the urgent tone of the repeated request, and in a moment more was whirling up Broadway.

"If I hesitated to avail myself of your considerate offer, Miss Secret," he said, after a minute's silence, feeling that the kindly eyes of the lady were fixed inquiringly and anxiously upon him, "it is not

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because I am seriously hurt, as you may suppose, though I fear I have unnecessarily shocked you."

"No; but you have, indeed, greatly changed, Mr. Alpine, since I saw you on the steamer—the life and soul of gayety. Surely it is not bad news at home that has so disturbed you?"

"Not wholly. But, forgive me, if I do not speak of myself. Man is the creature of circumstances—the slave of events in the shaping of which he had no share. Tell me, rather, of yourself"—with forced lightness of manner—"of your progress in those higher studies that give poor mortals a foretaste of that celestial music which brings the angels down."

"Do not assume a forced gayety, Mr. Alpine," she said, gravely, looking at him with a deeper insight and a warmer interest than he knew. "Let me suggest that you seek advice of a physician. Or"—as he shook his head in strong distaste—"if you wish to know my musical progress, come and hear me sing. My grandpa will be pleased to see you again on shore, and you will be glad, I am sure, to meet once more the dearest, best old man that ever lived."

There was a cordiality in this invitation that moved the young man, which he promptly acknowledged.

Reaching the hotel he went directly to his rooms, closed and locked the door and lighted the gas.

Seen in the stronger light, he did not differ materially from the average young New Yorker, being tall, muscular and dressed in the prevailing fashion. Evidently a young man, but haggard and ghastly to the last degree, as if some great grief had suddenly fallen upon him with crushing weight.

He threw aside his coat, loosed his wristbands and collar and took from within his breast his recent purchase and laid it upon the table.

It was a loaded pistol!

Seating himself, he took from a drawer writing materials and deliberately wrote two or three brief notes, which, when done, he carefully sealed and addressed. With a fidelity to details which was a habit, he carefully replaced pens and paper, and set back the chairs with the air of a man who is finishing, as he supposes, the last work of his life. Something glittering on the floor attracted his attention. He picked it up.

It was a lady's earring. A trifling incident, yet for a moment it changed the current of his thoughts.

"The Prima Donna's!" he said. "I remember well noticing them when on the steamer. Singular that it should have attached itself to my coat and fallen here instead of in the street."

He opened the drawer and taking an envelope inclosed it, writing on the outside the lady's name and her address, and with its conclusion, the little episode vanished from his mind.

He began pacing up and down, busy with his thoughts. The sounds from the street came dully to his ears, and pausing in his walk, he went to the window, threw back the shutters and glanced out into the new-lighted streets.

A huge close-covered wagon with small grated windows, and a policeman on the step, was passing. Strangely enough the sight, too common as it is in our great cities, seemed to appall the young man. He shrank back and covered his face with his hands.

"And she will hereafter think me—Why should I prolong the agony?" he exclaimed. "Why seek oblivion abroad? The die is cast."

He had come to a halt beside the table and his hand was outstretched to grasp the weapon, when there came a sudden knock at the door.

Thrusting the pistol out of sight he stepped to the door and opened it.

A woman, closely veiled, was standing on the threshold, trembling with emotion, seemingly without power to advance or retreat.

"Iola!" he cried, not even the thick veil and partial disguise preventing the recognition. His face changed with the utterance to a wonderful brightness. He seemed transfigured.

She threw back her veil and rushed toward him while his arms moved as if to clasp her.

But, alas! why does he hesitate and fall back as she advances into the room? Why does the ashy pallor of despair sweep from his face all that brightness?

He shrinks backward, avoiding her glance, while his strong frame trembles with repression, and his voice which had attuned itself to melodious music in the mention of her name, changed to unnatural harshness as he exclaimed:

"Leave me—leave me! We can meet no more. Begone!"

But this manifestation of weakness was to her an element of new strength. Advancing to the table, and resting one shapely hand upon it, she faced the cowering young man.

"From your lips, only," she declared, slowly, "will I accept the truth. I see, Edward Alpine, that you have not forgotten me. Is my love so slight a thing that nothing would suit your purpose but a rejection at the altar?"

With extended hands, as if seeking to put from him all consideration of her deliberate and forceful questioning, his lips moved dumbly. He looked ghastly, and the lines of suffering about his mouth were strongly marked.

It was a strange picture.

But it lasted only a moment. Moving her hand unconsciously on the table it came in contact with the envelope in which he had placed the earring, and her glance fell upon the address.

It was her turn to avoid him now.

"He loves another—another," her voice sinking almost to a whisper, and turning from him in absolute silence, with a gesture of repudiation she moved toward the door.

But she had overrated her strength. She faltered, tottered, and would have fallen, like a storm-swept flower stricken from its stem, had not Alpine, with a hasty stride, caught her inanimate form in his strong arms. As if they were never more to part, he tenderly clasped her, and showered kisses like rain upon her pale lips and brow, with broken ejaculations of love and remorse.

Laying her on the sofa, he rung the bell with a force that left the cord in his hand.

But there was no waiting for an answer. A young man hastily entered.

It was Douglass Owen, somewhat disordered by a rapid drive.

There was a strange expression on his face as his glance interpreted the situation, and in his eyes a sinister gleam.

"Good heavens, Ned!" he breathed, in a low voice of deep concern. "What has happened?"

"Silence, on your life!" was the hasty response. "It is Iola—she, you know—with hands and features working convulsively—"Hush! she has followed me here. Thank God, you have come! Take—take charge of her at once, and bear her home.

You did your errand well; I knew it by her presence here. Return with her immediately before her absence is discovered. All is over between us, and henceforth—but see, she moves! Once more—the last"—and unmindful of the lurid glance upon him he kissed her with a despairing fervor that brought her instantly back to consciousness. "You will see me no more," he added; and he rushed from the apartment as Iola rose to her feet.

Douglass Owen lost no time in explanation or apologies. With an earnest deference, inspired by his deep passion, he said:

"I am to take you home, Miss Marl. Your friends will be alarmed, should they miss you. I see that you came down by the train, or you would hardly have gotten here before me. We shall be somewhat longer driving back. Let us go at once."

Moving like one in a dream, she suffered herself to be led down the stairs and into the street. The carriage in which he had come from Washington Heights was at the door. He assisted her in and sprung in beside her. The boy in waiting handed him the reins, and, with a touch of the whip, they were off.

But the departure was not without an observer.

A man waiting in the deep shadow of a pillar of the portico, where she had passed so close that he could have touched her with his outstretched arm, started forward a pace and gazed after them with hands firmly clinched together, and features working convulsively.

It was Edward Alpine.

"Forever and forever!" he breathed in farewell, as his glance followed them. But, even while he gazed, he suddenly started with a new emotion.

"Why does he drive in that direction?" he asked himself. "His way homeward lies opposite," and then, as if illuminated by a sudden revelation of Owen's possible treachery, he hurried down the steps and followed the carriage, growing more and more excited as he ran.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAWYER AT HOME.

THE scene that followed Mr. Alpine's repudiation of his son, and the rejection of his message, would have been a study for a painter.

The half-fainting bride in Mrs. Alpine's arms—the startled clergyman—the enraged father—the inscrutable lawyer—and the astonished and sympathetic guests and friends made up a dramatic picture never to be forgotten.

But it lasted only a moment.

The courtly gentleman who never forgot the honor of his good name, nor the demands of society, in a few brief words of apology for his scant courtesy dismissed them all, and watched them one by one depart.

Not until he was alone did he hasten to his wife's side, then, by a sympathetic clasp of hands, he told her more than words could utter.

Mr. Bookout, returning from the hall, whither he had followed the messenger, with the rejected bride upon his arm, would have referred to the recreant lover in terms perhaps harshly befitting—or possibly to excuse—but Mr. Alpine, by a gesture, stopped him at the first syllable.

"He has chosen his own course," he said; "henceforth let him be forgotten. Not even in condemnation do I wish to hear his name."

Mr. Bookout bowed in acquiescence, and the group broke up, the ladies disappearing toward their respective apartments, while Mr. Alpine took the arm of the lawyer and led the way to the library.

Referring to the matter of our conversation just previous to—this affair," said Mr. Alpine, with a strong restraint upon his feelings, taking a seat and motioning his legal adviser to another, "I must put off for a week or two, at least, placing the matter before Mrs. Alpine as I had intended. Meanwhile, you will take charge of the letter, and any suggestions that may occur to you you will make a note of. You have seen the property, I think you told me?"

"Yes," assented Mr. Bookout; "but some years ago, and though neglected and going to waste, yet the location and its proximity to New York would give it prospective value of possibly some future importance, if a clear title could be had, though for present use it would hardly be worth taking."

"Has it never been repaired?" asked Mr. Alpine.

"Not recently," responded the lawyer; "but it might be, and in such case, with the progress of improvements, would make a young woman a small dowry, as the world goes—quite enough to prevent her having (what the writer seems to fear) the re-

straint of dependence, even were there nothing else."

Mr. Alpine nodded approvingly.

"It is yet too early to decide," he declared after a moment's thought, "of the acceptance of this proposition; but if there are no obstacles in the way, and it appears that the parties are eminently respectable, I know no reason why it cannot be entertained. Enough, however, of the matter at present. There are the papers."

He produced, and handed them to the lawyer as he spoke.

Mr. Bookout rose, placed them in his pocket, and buttoned his coat.

"Won't you stay?" asked Mr. Alpine, throwing off the business air which he had worn for a more social one. "Your room, you know, is always ready."

"Thanks, Mr. Alpine," responded the lawyer in a similar friendly spirit, "but I shall be expected downtown in my bachelor quarters."

He shook hands with his friend and client, and had already reached the door on his way out, when he turned back as if under the influence of a sudden thought.

"You will be pleased to hear," he said, "that I shall soon be able as I think, to place my hand upon that missing link in the Alpine family record for which we made so long a search in England."

"No?" questioned Mr. Alpine, with a sudden start of agreeable surprise which showed the deep interest he took in the matter. "Is it possible after all these years?"

"Quite possible," said Mr. Bookout, undisturbed by Mr. Alpine's warmth of manner, for he had seized both the lawyer's hands in his own. "Indeed I am positive, or I would not have mentioned it. Good-night."

Not without many expressions of gratification, however, was he allowed to depart. Finally being accompanied to the outer entrance by Mr. Alpine, who declared his intention of seeing him shortly and getting fuller details of the probable recovery of the long-sought link referred to.

The moon was shining brightly as he came down the steps and glanced up and down the roadway.

There was nothing in it, perhaps, to recall to his mind what he had said to Douglass Owen about the road to town being safe and smooth; much less to suggest the fact that Iola Marl, acting on the hint, was already seeking an interview with the recreant lover.

An hour later Mr. Bookout had reached the city and let himself into a tall angular building that fronted one of the principal squares.

Going up to his rooms on an upper floor, through the semi-darkness of the halls, he was in the act of unlocking the outer door of the suit of rooms in his occupancy, when a voice that would have startled a man of less firm temperament addressed him by name.

"What, are you here again?" he demanded. "I supposed you would have accomplished your destiny before this."

"And what is that?" questioned the voice in the darkness.

"To be hanged, of course," was the grim response. "That is the only proper ending to a career like yours."

There was a discordant chuckle in reply, doubtless meant for a laugh, but which ended in something very like a groan.

By this time the lawyer had inserted the key, thrown back the bolt, and opened the door.

The man lurking in the passage followed him in, and Mr. Bookout, turning up the gas, which was already burning low, wheeled and confronted him.

For the space of ten seconds, perhaps, he stood and looked at him, his glance going from crown to sole, noting every expression and feature as strongly and clearly as would a powerful camera.

"Not improved much, I see, Wilkes," he remarked, with no evidence of concern or sympathy in his voice, seating and busying himself at a desk which was covered with papers. "What do you want?"

"I want you to look at me. I am more sober than usual."

The lawyer very slightly elevated his eyebrows and glanced in his visitor's direction.

"Are you, indeed?" he questioned, doubtfully. "I had not observed that."

A man of fifty or thereabouts, but looking much older; dark, swarthy, with tangled masses of black hair and beard; such a face as is sometimes seen lurking about the wharves and emigrant-ships; and as if in keeping with such occupation, he wore a garb half nautical, half landsman's. Dissipation, late hours, and irregular habits seemed to have long ago marked him as their own.

"I have looked at you," said Mr. Bookout, again busy with his papers. "What do you want?"

"Money."

CHAPTER V.

THE VISITOR AND THE UNFINISHED CODICIL.

The lawyer rose and opened the door before making any reply.

"Have you any information to give in return?" he asked.

"No," said the man, hoarsely. "I told you all I had to tell long ago, and have sold, in my continued silence, honor and manhood."

"Stop," interrupted the lawyer; "on my word, Wilkes, you are getting facetious. Honor?"

"You will not believe it, I know, but I was a man once," declared the sinister-looking visitor, smiting his breast with savage earnestness, while his eyes flashed luridly in their sunken caverns.

"Possibly," said Mr. Bookout, rubbing his hands. "A court of justice would hardly take your word for it."

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The man moved a step nearer, and the lawyer looked at him fixedly a moment. His knowledge of men was great, and the needs and vices of this one apparent at a glance.

"Money, eh?" he ejaculated, with his customary calm.

Opening a drawer and still busy with his papers with the other hand, he took some money from it which he carefully counted and then tossed to his visitor.

"There are five dollars—make the most of it."

"I will," responded the man, his fiercer mood all gone, "and in return I will tell you something. They are changing things in The House on the Marsh—making repairs for new-comers."

The lawyer frowned.

"You have been there again?" he said, reprovingly.

"I couldn't help it," was the sullen response; "you have forbidden me ever putting myself in the way of Mrs.—"

"Stop!" thundered the lawyer, rising with electrical swiftness, and emerging from his desk at a single stride he seemed about to grasp his visitor by the throat, while his heavy brows contracted threateningly.

"Dare to ever utter that name," he breathed, in continuation, his tone scarcely above a whisper, "and I will strangle you on the spot!"

The man shrunk back. Evidently he had never seen the lawyer in a mood like this before.

"Look you, Wilkes," said Mr. Bookout, as suddenly returning to his natural voice and manner; "it is plain that you cannot be trusted. With the shadow of the gallows hanging over you, as it has been all these years, you are yet unable to understand my leniency in keeping from you the hounds of justice. If you are weary of life, say so at once and let it end by the rope. Perhaps the blood of that old man whom you struck down in the very act of adding a codicil to his will and placing you by his bounty and generous goodness above all future want is calling for expiation. Why, I may as well ask, should I longer interpose to prevent it?"

The dark visitor with his hands convulsively clutching at his heart, smitten down by these words, had sunk to the floor and was groveling at his feet.

The lawyer stood above him as unpityingly as if his figure had been cast in bronze.

"If you think differently," he continued, after a moment's pause, "and still believe you can hold to your promise so often reiterated to me, then go on a while longer in the fulfillment of the career, whatever it may be, which you have made your own. But, remember, you are not to come to me for aid, except in the utmost need. In such case I have not, and shall not, turn you away empty-handed. Go."

Not once looking in the direction of his visitor, Mr. Bookout calmly returned to his desk and easy-chair, and selecting a pen with some care began to write; scratch, scratch, scratch for some minutes, and when he at last looked up from the sheet which he had covered, and laid down the pen, he was alone.

He arose and locked the outer door, and threw open those of the interior apartments, lowered a window for the admission of air, and taking off his coat replaced it by an easy wrapper which he took from an inner closet.

This done he helped himself to some refreshments under a white napkin which had been brought in for him, walking slowly back and forth as he ate—not confining himself to the outer, or business office, but passing through the next apartment, which was a parlor, into the interior, occupied as a sleeping room. These were his "bachelor quarters"—large, lofty and rather soberly furnished, as befits a man of sixty—which, with meals regularly served from an adjacent eating house—made up his domestic life. Yet, inscrutable and unattractive as was the old lawyer and his surroundings, it is not impossible that loving hearts may have at some time yearned for him and little children climbed in frolicsome tenderness about his knees.

But if there had ever been a time when he was otherwise than we find him to-night, no present thought recalled it, as his first words showed.

"Strange," he breathed, putting aside the small tray with its napkin from which he had been eating, and coming out to the desk—"Strange, that I cannot get this wretched creature out of my mind to-night! Was I too careless in any particular or too harsh? Neither—keeping in view the situation—neither. As surely as the lightning's stroke follows the flash, so surely would an impolitic word ruin all, and Alpine's happiness fall—a house of cards."

He had resumed his easy-chair while speaking and now unlocking a small door in the desk which revealed an inner drawer, produced a key and unlocked that.

With no uncertainty in his search he removed the papers which lay uppermost in the drawer and took thence a small leather portfolio, of rather ancient origin. This was also locked, but a key of delicate workmanship which he selected from a number of others easily opened it.

There were several papers evidently placed there for the safest of safe keeping, but he took out only two, both worn and discolored.

Both of them were in writing, and one almost illegible, with ragged and torn edges. This he proceeded to copy, as follows:

"MARRIED. Date, November 4, 1710.—Sir James Alpine, Knight, of Alpine Manor, to Grace, only child of Edward Seacroft, Mariner, of Riverside. Alfred Arkwright, pastor. Witness: Henry Dent, seaman; Lucy Lane, spinster. A true copy—attest: Milo Marl, captain."

Mr. Bookout carefully verified it by comparison with the original.

"The missing link, undoubtedly," he affirmed; "but beyond the satisfaction of discovery, I fear it will not add much to Mr. Alpine's genealogical tree. The ways of those ancient mariners were devious enough, and mostly—

"—founded on the good old plan,
That he may take who has the power,
And he shall keep who can!"

"But whether the good Sir James secured a smuggled dowry with his bride or otherwise, we may thank Captain Milo Marl, probably a boon companion, for what appears to be a copy of the original leaf from the parish register, which our researches discovered to have been burned along with the village church."

He placed the copy in his pocket-book, returned the original to the portfolio, and took up the second paper.

"The old man's codicil," he reflected.

It was of much more recent origin than the other paper, dating only some few years back. But, what gave it a sinister interest, in connection with the reminder the lawyer had given his recent visitor, was a deep stain on one side where it had been grasped, when the writer was stricken down, by a man's thumb and forefinger, which was indelibly outlined in a color that had now faded to a dingy brown. It was as follows:

"CODICIL

TO THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ANDREW MARL.

"The stain of blood is not easily effaced. The evil that men do survives them. Innocent children inherit the consequences of false lives. Only self-help, and God's help can remove the stain of a vicious ancestry.

"I consider this, and believe the worthless character of my nephew, Hugh Wilkes, a rascally outgrowth from the wretched career of our smuggling ancestor. I therefore reinstate my said nephew in my affections, and bequeath to him the whole residue of my estate. And by thus placing him above temptation, I hope to incite him to reform.

"With extremest charity for his faults, and love toward all whom—"

"There was a mystery about the old man's burial from the hospital that has never been clear to me," reflected the lawyer as he eyed the document. Perhaps there was a purpose in it—who knows? Too late now to ascertain."

And returning the paper to its hiding-place he extinguished the light and went to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

IOLA'S RETURN.

THE purpose that had suddenly actuated Douglass Owen was a desperate one.

Iola's indiscretion in leaving home without the knowledge of her friends for an interview with her recreant lover had placed in Owen's hands a powerful lever to use against her.

In utter defiance of what might be the result, he had already determined to take her—not to her own home, as he had been ordered—but to a hotel; and thus cut off from the reach of friends, place her still more in his power. He would seize the opportunity thus offered and declare the deep passion with which he regarded her, hoping while under the shame of her rejection by Edward Alpine to gain her favorable assent.

A purpose that would have soon become strongly apparent to any one less disturbed than herself.

As it was she sat in the corner of the carriage, cloaked and hooded, quite lost to her situation and surroundings.

The glance of Douglass Owen, turned occasionally in that direction, looked in vain for any indication that she was observant of their progress.

Once or twice his lips parted to address her in a passionate outpouring of love and consolation. But as often would a thought of the warning of the grim lawyer come uppermost to check him.

In adopting his dastardly course he knew he must dare the girl's inevitable anger which would follow the revelation of his treachery, and throw himself upon her kindness and generosity for forgiveness in the one great plea of his absorbing love.

The rashness, presumption, and utter folly of such a scheme he appeared to wholly lose sight of in the devouring passion that urged him on.

To such as he, however, there appears no middle course. Even while he thus debated with his own dark schemes the young girl roused herself and put aside her thick veil, revealing a lovely countenance in which grief, beauty, and resolve fitfully blended. Maidenly purity, womanly dignity, love and tenderness seemed pleading for compassionate sympathy in successive appeals.

It almost carried him beyond his control, and had time and opportunity been given him he would then and there have declared the deep passion he felt for her.

The words were actually rising to his lips in a reckless outburst of love, entreaty and devotion, when the sound of horse's feet rapidly galloping behind them recalled him to himself.

Even then it was only by a desperate effort that he so far restrained his purpose for the moment as to silence his hurried breathing, while he listened to the ominous sound.

So absorbed was the young girl in her own emotions that nothing of all this was apparent to her, and when at length she did speak it gave but an indication of her anxious desire to reach home before the discovery of her absence should be followed by alarm.

"I shall not soon forget your kindness, Mr. Owen,

in taking me promptly home," she said; "and my poor thanks must make amends for those of my dear adopted father; for, as you will readily perceive, the fact of my leaving the house had better remain for the present as it is—unknown to others." He nodded assent, but hardly breathed, for while she was speaking the indications of pursuit grew louder and louder.

In the great city there was nothing special in the sound of a horse's feet perhaps, but the sinister motives that filled Owen's breast made him a prey to ready suspicions, and he tried to peer into the darkness, and, by the flickering lights, as they hurried past, get a view of the one behind him.

He could only see that it was a man on a powerful horse. But in sudden alarm he drew rein and drove down a side street at right angles to the one he was in, turning a corner sharply.

The man on horseback did the same.

Owen touched his horse with the whip, reached the end of the block and whirled down another street, and looking back he saw the man still following behind him.

The warning of Mr. Bookout came to him with sudden force.

Was this some one he had sent to watch him?—and he recalled his last words with regard to the night and the caution it had conveyed.

He reached an avenue running north, leading into Bloomingdale road in the direct route homeward.

He turned into it without a moment's hesitation, but looking back he saw the man on horseback still following him, keeping, as he had done all along, even pace with him.

His was one of those seemingly honest natures, of which there are many in the world, that require coercing to secure justice.

He was watched. There was no longer any doubt of it.

With this conviction full upon him his deeper purpose relaxed and he drove straight homeward with the young girl.

The Alpine mansion was situated on a noble rise of ground, laid off in successive terraces, and reached by a series of massive steps more or less shaded, leading up from huge, ornamental gates, beyond which was the roadway and a broad lawn sloping down to the railway and river below—the majestic Hudson.

The hour was not yet late, and to reach the house and the quiet of her own room without being discovered was now the anxious desire of Iola.

At her urgent request Owen, whose thoughts and attention had been mainly devoted to his pursuer, stopped before reaching the great gates and assisted her from the carriage.

"Thank you for a friendly act, Mr. Owen," she said, gently, as she placed her small hand in his.

"Do not refer to it," he responded. "You know I am Ned's friend," and they shook hands and parted.

There was a small side-entrance at the corner of the great wall and through this Iola passed.

As she saw the carriage move away she went up the winding walk, which was very much shaded by the trees and shrubbery, until, with her heart beating somewhat faster than usual, she emerged within the shadow of the massive building. The moon was still shining brightly, but at this side of the house the shadows lay deep and heavy as she swiftly glided through the obscurity—no lights being visible.

A little further at the back there was a wing containing a number of rooms devoted at some seasons of the year to the occupancy of guests, but now vacant; through these Iola had left the house, leaving the door unfastened with a view to her return. Toward this door, which was seldom used, she directed her steps, keeping close within the shadow.

Once a rustling of the trees caused her to come to a sudden pause, shrink against the wall and listen intently for a step. But, there was apparently no one on that side of the house, and the sound she had heard only the rising of the wind.

She breathed more freely and sped onward with a step like a fairy.

In a moment she had reached the disused entrance, glided softly up the steps and let herself in.

Coming from the comparative light outside, the interior seemed intensely dark. But she had been out and in through this part of the house before, and its being unlighted and disused now gave her no sensation of fear, although had her mind been less preoccupied the time and the place were eminently calculated to have that effect.

She had groped her way through the hall, had reached the door, and was congratulating herself on her successful return, when it suddenly opened and a blinding light from a bull's-eye lantern in the hands of a man wearing a mask, was flashed full in her face.

Shocked by the suddenness of the encounter she reeled backward helplessly.

Before her lips could move to utter a cry a thick cloth was thrown over her head and she felt herself rudely grasped, while a pungent odor filled the air, then she lost all consciousness.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS SEACROFT.

NED ALPINE—for it was, of course, he who had followed the carriage, had seen from a distance Iola enter his father's grounds.

With a sigh of relief, and some doubts arising as to whether his suspicion of Owen had not done him injustice, he wheeled about and returned to the city.

His night's ride, however, and the conflict of emo-

tions aroused had had one good effect. It had taken his thoughts for a time from himself.

He no longer wished to die.

He would go abroad again and forget in another country the anguish and misery that had come to him and others in this.

Disposing of his horse he reached his hotel just in time to meet in the main hall a little group returning from the opera, the central figure of which was Miss Seacroft, the singer—which instantly, so to speak, absorbed him and he ascended the stairs with them.

He would have excused himself and gone to his rooms, but the lady would not permit it.

"You are looking so greatly improved, Mr. Alpine," she asserted, "that I am quite sure your health will not suffer by being kept up half an hour longer."

He was cordially welcomed by the grandfather, a sprightly old man of about seventy, with a boyish face, with the whitest of white hair, and florid complexion, indicative of an out-door life and a sea climate. The others of the party were their attendants—an elderly lady with features strongly suggestive of an undertaker's assistant, and her son, a marked contrast of seventeen, with countenance like a full moon, addicted to science as found in Jules Verne's works and in Robinson Crusoe.

"You see, sir," said the old man, shaking young Alpine heartily by the hand, "you have no resource except to come with us. My darling commands the fleet, and whether we will or no we must obey. In case of running away it becomes my duty to bring you in."

And, laughing at what he was pleased to consider his own facetiousness, he clung to Alpine's arm and they followed Miss Seacroft and her attendants to her rooms.

There was a piano in the apartment and the young lady, throwing aside her wrappings, went to the instrument and seated herself, while the boyish old gentleman talked with a friendly warmth and earnestness that made Alpine feel, in spite of his preoccupied thoughts, and his fear of intrusion, completely at ease.

Seen in the full light of the brilliant chandelier, and vivacious with the excitement of artistic triumph and well-earned plaudits—strengthened perhaps by a growing interest in the young man—Grace Seacroft presented a charming picture.

There was a subdued mellowess in the dark glances of her eyes as she looked at Alpine—a musical cadence in her tone—a willowy grace in every movement of the lithe figure—an air of self-command and control in every turn of the well-poised head that, to a young man not engrossed by thoughts of another, might have attracted him, heart and soul, and carried his best affections captive forthwith.

But Edward Alpine was not thus free.

The dark mystery in which he was enshrouded that had culminated in his rejection of the gentle and lovely Iola, left him but little thought to give to Miss Seacroft.

But the boyish old man, her grandfather, was not slow to notice and appreciate her charms of voice and manner. To him in his guileless boyishness these were ever a new joy.

His gaze was fixed upon her in rapt attention that told the great love that was bound up with her life.

She sung.

But what she sang is unnecessary to record, and although Edward Alpine sought to do so he could not afterward remember. It may have been some airy nothing of the French school, or more solid music of German origin, or soft Italian airs that comprehended both. But the whole was vocal and instrumental harmony such as Alpine had never previously heard.

It ceased, however, as all things good or indifferent must, and the young lady arose from the piano and turned—smilingly triumphant, at the knowledge of having given an innocent pleasure—toward her guest.

The young man expressed his gratification in complimentary words that had the double merit of being brief and sincere, and were doubtless all the more appreciated, while the boyish grandfather exclaimed, with as much enthusiasm as if it were the first time he had ever seen or heard her, with much clapping of hands:

"Glorious, my darling—you are glorious tonight."

After a brief interchange of thought on unimportant topics, the young man rose from his seat to withdraw to his own apartments.

"To-morrow we shall be out of town," said Miss Seacroft, as she gave him her hand. "Grandpa is interested in an old place on the Jersey coast, known by the unromantic name of *The House on the Marsh*. It has been terribly out of repair and in a dilapidated state for years, but we have ordered it made inhabitable and propose going down there to-morrow to see what progress has been made. If you take an interest in the ancient history of New York a trip with us might give you an insight into some of its byways. One of the old Dutch Governors is said to have once lived there, and more recently it has been one of the irregular haunts of the pirates of Barnegat. So you see," concluded Miss Seacroft, with a musical laugh, "we are enabled to offer you first-class inducements to visit it. Will you come?"

"Only too happy to do so," responded Alpine, forced out of his gloomy abstraction by her determined kindness and cordial interest.

"Thanks for the promise. I will send you word at what hour we shall start."

And in a more hopeful mood the young man said good-night, and went to his rooms.

CHAPTER VIII. AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW.

THE enterprise and energy of the New York morning papers, which makes them a map of each day's life and its vast concerns, is so well known, that their promptness in publishing the following item of incorrect news in their early editions need excite no comment.

"MASKED BURGLARS AGAIN.—At a late hour last night, the daughter of one of our well known citizens, Mr. Frazier Alpine, residing at Washington Heights, was found insensible in a disused wing of the mansion. The dwelling had been ransacked, in part, by burglars, some of the valuables belonging to the house having been dropped at the door where the young lady was found, together with a mask and some burglar's tools. It is supposed the young lady was returning from the garden, where she had been for a walk, when she suddenly encountered the rogues bearing off their plunder, and, to silence her, a cloth ready steeped in chloroform was thrown over her head. Though the best medical skill is in attendance, the shock was of such severity that she still continues unconscious, and there is even yet a possibility of a fatal result. The boldness of the outrage is more apparent when we consider that the other side of the house was occupied at the time, and it is only another evidence, to which we have so often called attention, of the necessity of an addition of brains to our already large police force."

This item was read by Edward Alpine as he was finishing his breakfast in his room, and reminded him with terrible force of what he had been persistently trying to put from him—the events of yesterday and the consequences of his own act.

"Shocked, insensible, still unconscious, and may prove fatal."

He glared at the paper as it lay where it had fallen from his trembling fingers, as he repeated the words, while a sensation of despair stole over him."

Oh, that he had been with her to guard and protect, instead of appearing in the light of a villain, whose word no man or woman could henceforth trust.

"What should he now do?" he asked himself. "Should he visit his father's house? No! He knew too well that father's stern, uncompromising sense of justice, not to feel that he would be a far more unwelcome intruder now than even masked burglars. No; he would not go there, but he would see Mr. Bookout, that grim old lawyer, who had forever been standing like a sentry in his way. He would see him and obtain from him particulars of the message that he had yesterday sent him. He would demand the proofs. It might be that, yet—"

He broke off suddenly in his reflections, and rising made some hasty changes in his dress, and leaving word he would be absent for an hour or more, started forth on his errand.

Half an hour afterward he was knocking at the door of Mr. Bookout's suit of rooms, and in answer to the response, "Come in," he entered and found himself in the presence of Mr. Bookout.

The lawyer was sitting at his desk in his customary easy-chair, but rose on the appearance of his visitor.

"Ah," he said, in a tone of some surprise. "It is you, Ned! I hardly expected this honor to-day," and he waved him to a seat near the door.

Young Alpine dropped into it.

He had never been a match, it dimly occurred to him, for his father's legal man of business, and he did not waste words in apologies or compliments, but sought to concentrate his powers on the business in hand.

"You have seen the paper this morning?" questioned Mr. Bookout taking up one on a side-table as he paused beside it and immediately laying it down again. "You know what happened last night at home to Iola?"

Alpine bowed.

"And have come to me regarding it?" continued Mr. Bookout. "A sad affair following so close on the heels of the—of the other"—he added the last words slowly. "You do not, of course, purpose going there?"

His searching eyes were fixed for an instant on the young man's face.

"No," he responded, gravely. "Not unless matters can be placed in a different light."

"An unnecessary proviso," interrupted the lawyer. "I do not see," he continued, with rather more sternness in his manner, "how they can be placed in a different light. The situation is one of your own creating."

The young man interrupted him impatiently:

"I admit all that, and more; but what I wish are proofs—proofs that the situation is as you have stated it, in your communication yesterday. What evidence have you that the woman is, as you declare, still living?"

"The very best," said Mr. Bookout, with his customary calm, "the very best. Proofs? They are far too easy! You seem to forget the situation. One, I repeat, of your own creating. Let me, without prejudice, recall it to you. Edward Alpine, I can see as you have grown older you have grown wiser! But nine years ago—"

"Let me say at once, Mr. Bookout," interrupted young Alpine, "I was not a youthful moralist."

"Nine years ago," repeated the lawyer as if Alpine had not spoken, "you were in the habit of frequenting haunts you would have done better to have avoided—low concert-rooms, dance-halls and the like—I seek no excuse for this—you need make none," as the young man moved with restless impatience. "On such an occasion you met a certain young Frenchwoman, an *attache* of the place—shall I name her?"

"No, it is unnecessary," said Alpine, as if defiant

of the worst, and speaking rapidly; "I met her thus, and in three days I married her, and in three weeks thereafter she fled from me with another man; and in three months more she was dead, as I heard and believed."

Mr. Bookout nodded.

"The whole story," continued the young man, "is a hideous dream, and seems to me like the distempered imaginings of a fevered existence."

"Knowing this, Edward Alpine," resumed the old lawyer, "as I have done all these years—conscious of your boyish weakness in it, as well as of your suffering by it—can you question my motives in at last preventing your involving yourself still deeper? When I found that that woman was *not* dead, can you wonder that I stood between you and the gentle girl whom you were about to marry, and whose heart you would have broken?"

"No, no," interrupted Alpine earnestly; "not to save my life would I willfully cause her a pang."

"And I have stood between you and your father—that proud and chivalrous old man, the pride of whose life is in his unsullied family name. Not for the world would I have made known to him your early faults; and had you remained abroad till I could have communicated with you, the bitter culmination of last night might have been spared him—spared us all. No, Ned," continued the old lawyer in a milder tone, "I have simply endeavored to do my duty as I have understood it, and while you doubtless would regret the knowledge of your wife being alive, I was glad to know of it, if such was the fact, in time. The knowledge did not come too soon."

Ned shuddered.

"But the proofs, Mr. Bookout—the proofs!"

The lawyer slightly elevated his heavy eyebrows.

"You do not doubt my word," he said.

"No, no, but in a matter like this is there not a possibility of a mistake? Are you sure of the evidence? That—"

There was some impatience in the lawyer's manner, as he interrupted him.

"Positive!" he declared. "If you wish the confirmation of the truth by your eyesight you can have it."

"How?" questioned the young man.

"By seeing her!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE VAILED WOMAN.

EDWARD ALPINE fell back in his chair.

For a moment he was speechless.

"It is true," said Mr. Bookout slowly, watching the effect of his words as he spoke,—"that we might invoke the law in your behalf."

"I thought of that, and it might be considered were it not for one thing," commented Alpine, after a minute's silence.

"And what is that?" questioned the lawyer.

"The fear that she—that Iola would not marry a divorced man, for of course she would have to be told all the details of that wretched and unfortunate affair."

The lawyer nodded approvingly.

Those brains of yours are clearer than they were, Ned," he said; "and there is still another difficulty: the probability of the legal proceedings, that must necessarily expose the whole business of your youthful folly, becoming known to your father."

"I could brave that, anything, all things—rather than have Iola despise the man she once loved."

"That sentiment is not objectionable," admitted the lawyer, "in one of your age; and I should expect no less from your father's son—my friend of half a century;" and as if to emphasize the words he gave the young man his hand.

"I cannot attempt to advise you, Ned, under the peculiar and disagreeable circumstances," he continued with some degree of frankness. "It appears to me, however, that your project of again going abroad is wise. Time will exert its healing influence, and—Hah! there's a knock—and, now I remember, it is possibly your father; he spoke of seeing me shortly. Under the circumstances you had better not see him."

"No," said Ned, who had already risen.

"Step into my parlor adjoining, then; you will not be detained long."

As Alpine disappeared, Mr. Bookout promptly opened the door, but the look of expectation on his features gave place to his customary official air as he bade his visitor enter, and resumed his seat at his desk.

It was a woman closely veiled who entered, and with an air of brisk and ready assurance approached him.

The lawyer looked at her with evident recognition, but no apparent pleasure at seeing her.

"I did not expect you, madam," he said, coolly.

The woman pushed back her veil, partly exposing her features, which were of the brunette type, dark and regular, and indicating a woman of possibly thirty, though she would as easily have passed for one older or younger than that.

There was a restlessness about the full dark eyes—a nervousness in voice and manner—that seemed peculiar to her, and something about the corners of the mouth in the down-drawn lines that would prevent persons of ordinary caution from making her a confidant of important secrets.

She rested a rather well-rounded arm on the lawyer's desk and whipped the fingers of one hand with the fingers of the empty glove which she carried in the other.

Something in the movement suggestive of vehemence and passion, the lawyer who was observant of this had thought, for he had noticed the same thing before. But he was not now thinking of it. He was thinking of Ned, as he looked at her and was

THE WIFE'S SECRET.

wishing at that moment that the door was sufficiently ajar for him to see her.

"You are very busy, monsieur, the lawyer," said this strange visitor, with a slightly French accent.

"Always busy, madame. You have come to me for some purpose?"

"I have, monsieur. You know our little compact—agreement?"

"I do. The time is not up yet," he interrupted, looking at her over the top of a law-book which he had taken up.

"Monsieur is sharp. No—it is not up yet; that is why I have come. But this time I would like the money you promised, in advance," she continued, speaking more rapidly; "I wish to go to New Orleans. I have a position offered me as figurante, and if I make as much money as I expect it is not probable that I shall give monsieur, the lawyer, the opportunity of paying me any more money, which he so much likes."

She laughed, showing a set of exceedingly white teeth, but the lawyer did not smile.

He laid down the book, drew before him pen and paper and made a little memoranda which, holding in his hand, he permitted her to read.

"Is it correct?" he asked.

"It is correct, as monsieur, the lawyer, is always correct."

He arose and went into the next room, shutting the door behind him.

He found young Alpine walking to and fro in considerable excitement of manner.

"You heard that voice?" questioned the lawyer.

"Distinctly—and recognized it."

"Would you care to glance at her?"

"No," he replied with strong emphasis. "It is sufficient that it is she."

Yet, how strange a thing is Fate! Had Edward Alpine adopted the suggestion of the old lawyer and glanced at his waiting mistress, the result might have then and there changed the current of his life.

Mr. Bookout opened a small safe, devoted to personal rather than business uses, and took from it some money, with which he returned to the outer office.

The young man waited two minutes, perhaps five—heard a door open and close—and Mr. Bookout called him out.

His late visitor had departed.

"I did not expect," he said, "that you would obtain a confirmation of the evidence you desired so soon, Ned. But, let it end here, for the present, and good riddance. She's off for New Orleans, so she says, and she hints that New York has seen the last of her. If so," he added with some facetiousness of manner, "New York will probably bear the burden of her absence with becoming spirit. But I must go at once to Washington Heights," he concluded. "Don't look so gloomy, Ned. Trust to Time to help you. The world is wide and much will be expected of you yet."

Summoning a clerk, from somewhere below, to look after the office during his absence, the two came out of the building together and parted at the steps.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOUSE ON THE MARSH.

BELLOW New York on the Jersey side is a long narrow strip of land bordering the ocean, which is sometimes alluded to in general phrase, as the Jersey marshes. Not that the marsh in question comprises all so termed, but the special one with which our pen has to do had at its back what might be termed a foothill rising perhaps fifty feet or more above the surrounding low land.

At its right, winding and widening to the sea, is a salt bayou, rising and falling with the action of the tide, in the haven of which lie occasionally small sailing vessels and which forms a thoroughfare for oyster boats and similar craft that ply a vocation to and from the country village at the head of navigation.

On this small ridge of rising ground which had once evidently been a mere sand-hill thrown up by the sea, there was a large old-fashioned roomy mansion, which with its various out-buildings, occupied the crest, the grounds on each side sloping to the marsh and river.

This place was reached in fair weather by a shell road constructed for the purpose, but otherwise was easily accessible from the river side by boats from the sea. In foul weather and high tide the last method was the only one, for on such occasions the whole marsh for miles around was covered and the roadway was washed by the surf.

Whatever name had been given this estate in earlier days it had come to be known by all the immediate neighborhood as The House on the Marsh.

That it had once been the residence of one of the old Knickerbocker Governors, as Miss Seacroft asserted, was undoubtedly true, and the strange stories that were rife in regard to its having also been the haunt of the wreckers of Barnegat, might have been true in the old days, now so remote. But at present no one regarded the visitors of late years to that neighborhood as having any more sinister occupation than that of fishermen, or hunters seeking for such game as frequent the inlets and marshes.

Some of the older inhabitants of the vicinity could remember periods in former years when lights were seen to sift to and fro, and carriages and persons on horseback went back and forth along the old shell road. And these occasions, which were mostly in midsummer, were usually signalized by considerable activity in The House on the Marsh, which was supposed to indicate the arrival of the proprietor.

But these periods belonged to former years, and the house had long been given over to decay and dilapidation.

At the present time there was new food for gossip in the arrival of carpenters, painters, and workmen who had set to work upon the house and grounds making needed repairs.

This was the old place of which Miss Seacroft had spoken, and that arrangements had been made to visit on the day following her meeting with Edward Alpine.

Could the young man have rescinded his promise to accompany them he would gladly have done so, and hurried at once aboard ship to return abroad, but as the steamer would not sail until the following Saturday, he had no valid reason for excuse beyond his own wretchedness, and so, at the appointed hour he made his appearance, and joining Miss Seacroft's party they set forth together.

In these days when railways and steamboats have made expeditions into the country, and river and coast towns, easy and habitual with hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, the question of transportation is of secondary importance in most cases. In this it involved crossing the ferry, a ride by rail, and a conveyance by carriage—which last it must be admitted was of a somewhat primitive sort, and possibly all the more enjoyable.

This trip was made forever memorable to Edward Alpine in various ways, not only by Miss Seacroft's amiable exertions to draw him out of the gloomy despondency which was continually returning upon him, but by the incongruous peculiarities of her attendants.

Odd as was the character of Mr. Seacroft so unlike that of most men of his age, having a vast amount of physical energy and mental shrewdness, allied to boyish characteristics, the young man found his interest quite as strongly challenged in Mrs. Chaperone and her son Cyrus.

Mrs. Chaperone, it appeared, was the widow of a man who had been one of the most exalted and refined gentlemen of this or any other age, whose personal attributes and whose scholarly acquirements no less than his position in society made him alike a marvel to those who knew him and to those who knew him not.

At least this is the opinion that Mrs. Chaperone chose to entertain of her late lamented lord, and sought to fasten upon others. The view which the deceased would take in such and such cases she continually quoted.

With the exception of this peculiarity, however, Mrs. Chaperone was a most excellent soul, discreet and reliable and altogether trustworthy in her position, as Miss Seacroft had found.

Her son, the fat Cyrus, was in every respect a complete contrast to his mother as we have already said. His face beaming like a full moon with good nature and health, and with a dry sense of humor that served as an admirable counterpoise for his mother's lugubriousness.

They reached the old place about noon, but found that the workmen who had been employed—unlike most workmen nowadays, it must be admitted—had seemed in a hurry to finish the task assigned them, had limited themselves to the exact repairs, suggested by the strict letter of their orders, and had gone, taking their tools with them; from which it was inferred that they would not return.

Though this had not been expected by Mr. Seacroft it created no surprise, and thanks to the usefulness of the boy, Cyrus, an entrance was easily effected in the absence of keys through one of the windows, and bolts and bars removed, and the party admitted.

The ringing of distant bells, and the suggestion of the hour of noon, induced the speedy unpacking of the hamper brought, and under Miss Seacroft's supervision, Cy and his mother, Mrs. Chaperone, soon spread out in the ample porch, whence the view looked out to sea, a lunch which, to appetites sharpened by the ride and the salt air, proved very attractive.

After its merits had been fully discussed, the party proceeded to an examination of the house and grounds.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PANEL PORTRAITS.

THE large rooms in the main building had been put in habitable shape—so declared the old gentleman as they looked at them—adding with a somewhat doubtful quaver of voice in the midst of his enthusiasm, as he looked at his grand-daughter, that it would depend very much on her how soon they could take actual possession.

"Are you then in such a hurry, grandpa?" she questioned, looking back over her shoulder with a bright smile of inquiry from where she was standing with Alpine.

"I? Oh, no, my darling; your time is always my time, no matter when it may be; but the old house is such a strange place we shall need a long time to get acquainted with it.

"And our stay to-day will necessarily be short and consequently merely the prologue, grandpa," she replied, "and we need not decide anything further than to ascertain what we are likely to require in case we do come. The interior thus far does not seem inviting."

"No, but quite the contrary," declared Mrs. Chaperone, the funereal melancholy of whose face had in nowise lightened. "It is the most gloomy and forbidding place I ever saw in the whole course of me life," she continued, "and if me dear C. was living—"

"Which, thank goodness, he isn't," interpolated Miss Seacroft, in a stage-whisper, to Alpine.

"I know he would never, never consent to me living a single week in such a place! And really, really, dear Miss Seacroft, he would, I know he would, insist that, dearly as I love you, I should give you warn-

ing," and her countenance, from which all hope appeared to have fled, disappeared in a square of cambric.

"But not until we have explored further, I hope," said Miss Seacroft, restraining a strong impulse to laugh. "We have not seen the whole house yet. When we have, it may seem more attractive. Let us go on with our investigations. Come!" and she moved toward an inner room.

"But to think of this being the haunt of Dutch Governors, pirates and such—it makes me blood run c-o-o-l-d. Oh!"

The final shriek, with which she concluded, was extorted from her by the mischievous Cy, who had softly approached the window, near which she was standing, from the outside, and gently slapped her cheek with the tail of a fish that he had just caught.

"Cyrus!" cried Miss Seacroft, reprovingly.

"Beg pardning, mum, but ma is allus a-worryin' and sighin' when 'tain't no use, and it's just that that puts the Old Boy into me. S'posin' I was ter sigh now, like a bellus; it 'ud take the life right out of me."

And, shutting first one eye and then the other, two or three vigorous sighs broke from him which shook his fat frame so tremendously that the rickety porch actually creaked in sympathy.

His action and manner were irresistible.

There was a ripple of musical laughter from Miss Seacroft, at which Mrs. Chaperone's face, coming out of the folds of her handkerchief, brightened up a little.

"Look at him!" she cried to Miss Seacroft, but whether in admiration or despair, it is impossible to say, "after all me teaching! What would me dear C. say to him if he were living? But he himself has said it—the Old Boy is in him, sure enough."

Cy did present just then rather a singular appearance, it must be admitted. He had found time already to take off his coat and collar, had turned up his trowsers to the knees and his sleeves to the shoulder, and with his bare neck, arms and legs, fat as a well-rounded seal, and flushed with the excitement of having caught his first fish, had something of the look-framed as he was by the window—of a picturesque painting of a Dutch fisher-boy.

Miss Seacroft appeared to think so, for she exchanged glances with young Alpine, and the latter said:

"The fishing is good, I conclude?"

"Tiptop, sir. Down by the old boat-house an' long by the old sea-wall they're awful thick—bite fast as you can drop a hook. I've got lines enough for all, and plenty of bait."

"All right, Cy," said Mr. Seacroft; "we will be around there, by and by," and, whistling as he ran, the boy disappeared.

The party then proceeded to further examination of the rooms on the ground floor, of which there were more than twenty in all, and found, in spite of the recent repairs of those in front, that they were still rather unsatisfactory.

They then ascended a broad, open stairway, in an excellent state of preservation, at the head of which there was a broad and lofty apartment with two or three stately chambers opening out to the right and left.

It was evident at a glance that this lofty room at the head of the staircase was the state apartment of the old Dutch Colonial period, for the doors and wainscoting, as well as the ceiling, were thickly studded with ancient carvings of oak, and there were a number of painted panels let into the woodwork.

Miss Seacroft uttered a cry of surprise and delight when she saw it, and even Mrs. Chaperone forgot her prophetic declaration of evil of what "me dear C." would have said had he lived, and was startled out of her funereal enjoyments of anticipatory woe, into silence.

"The old Governor's room for certain," declared Miss Seacroft, clapping her hands with childish joy at a new discovery. "See what a magnificent view it commands from this window of the ocean yonder, and here he could look to the south and west and dream of future empires waiting the march of the all-conquering white man."

"Yes—yes, my enthusiastic darling," assented the boyish grandfather, reappearing from one of the adjoining state-chambers and running toward her, with surprising activity. "Everything, is in fair preservation, my dear," he continued, "considering the lapse of time, and neglect. Look at these panel paintings."

And he proceeded to open the shutters of all the windows so as to throw a stronger light upon them. Broad bands of mellowing sunshine fell into the room, brightening all it touched.

Through its quickening influence the shadows of gloomy years fell away like magic; the musty room became flecked with whiteness, and dusty portraits glowed at once with new life.

"Why, they are family portraits!—or at least they ought to be," declared Miss Seacroft in a tone half assertion—half doubt.

Stained, faded and injured as some of them were, they still gave ample evidence of faithful artistic work, whether her conjecture was true or otherwise.

There was the traditional Dutch Governor of Colonial times in his quaint and awe-inspiring robes of office, and opposite to him a lovely ancient dame, whom he might have won to be his bride in some happier hour when the lover's ardor gave place to the magisterial dignity.

So Miss Seacroft thought.

There was also a cavalier with gay attire and flowing sleeves, silver buckles and long sword, wearing a slouched hat with drooping ostrich plume, who, Mrs. Chaperone suggested, might have been "one of those haunting Barnegat pirates ready to cut—"

"Cut and run!" interrupted Mr. Seacroft, who eyed the picture with no great favor. "More likely a smuggler captain of the 17th century," he added with a strange light in his eye.

There was a sudden pause in the lively flow of comment and exclamation which followed this—an impulsive action of Edward Alpine that concentrated all eyes upon him.

His glance had wandered with more or less curiosity and interest from panel to panel, and had turned to the portraits on the opposite side of the room, when his gaze suddenly centered on one in the middle.

He hastily moved toward it and a glow of recognition leaped into his face.

"Good Heavens!" he breathlessly exclaimed. "How came that portrait here?"

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE OLD STATE APARTMENT.

The recognition by Edward Alpine of a face among the panel-portraits in the old Dutch Governor's room in The House on the Marsh, was an event that might well startle his companions.

For, if the paintings were executed in the seventeenth century, how could it be possible for him to recognize an acquaintance?

This was the very natural thought of the Prima Donna as she pressed forward to take a closer view of the picture.

It was that of a young and lovely girl in the first dawn of budding womanhood, with fair and regular features, graceful as a fawn, and with marvelous eyes that in life must have been bewitching in their luminous intelligence.

Years, probably centuries, had elapsed since the painter had done his work, and the touch of time was over all; but even yet, it seemed to Edward Alpine as if the bright eyes and fairy figure, and charming grace of Iola Marl were once more before him.

For a minute, perhaps two, he stood like one enthralled and gazed upon the picture, while the others in the room grouped themselves about him, and the boyish old gentleman, in growing excitement, looked from the painting to Alpine and back again with surprised inquiry, until at length the young man said, like one who breaks a spell that has bound him:

"Strange, that there should be such a resemblance! It seems impossible that it should be an accident," and, turning, he added in explanation: "I know a lady for whom that portrait might have been painted, with some slight change in the fancy costume, which the artist has given her."

"Is the lady a resident of the city?" asked Mr. Seacroft, with considerable eagerness of manner.

"Yes."

"Perhaps a relation of yours?" continued the old gentleman.

"Yes—in a certain sense, I suppose I might deem her a relative," he replied, speaking rather slowly. "She is the adopted daughter of my father."

There was a curious sense of relief expressed in the face of Miss Seacroft on hearing this reply, and her features which had been slightly strained with curiosities, or perhaps interest, resumed their natural mobility.

"It is really remarkable that it should bear such a striking resemblance," said Miss Seacroft. "The lady you mention must certainly be very beautiful, for in this ancient portrait the artist has evidently painted the original at her best. What a pity that it has been so neglected! But, we will remedy all that," continued the Prima Donna, vivaciously; "the room shall be restored. I really begin to be charmed with the place; this noble apartment, and the splendid views we get from these windows give it a special claim to my favor."

"Oh, Miss Seacroft, how can you say so?" exclaimed Mrs. Chaperone. "I am sure that me dear C. if he were living—"

"Would be sure to select one of these stately chambers for his own use," interrupted the Prima Donna with a musical laugh, that disturbed the long silent echoes; "so if you please, Mrs. Chaperone, don't let us consider any of his possible objections. We may come here, and we may not—it would be only for a brief period in any event—and you know, Mrs. Chaperone, how often I have urged you to look upon the bright side of things! But we are losing precious time; grandpa is already at the top of the house—let us follow him."

In fact, the voice of the old gentleman was heard at that minute calling to them to come up.

They obeyed, and by a shorter flight of stairs reached a roomy observatory constructed partly of glass, much of which had been broken and roughly replaced by boards.

From this look-out an unobstructed view could be had of the whole country for miles around.

"There is certainly nothing very cheering up here," was Miss Seacroft's comment, "and this is one of the points that should have come under the observation of the workmen. However, the needed repairs can be made later, under our own supervision. If we only knew the history of the place it would be so much more interesting. I fear, Mr. Alpine," she exclaimed, "you will deem your time misspent in coming out to it."

"On the contrary," he declared, "it is such an entirely new experience to me already that I would not have willingly missed it. But, as you say, its history would lend an additional charm. There must be information somewhere obtainable regarding it."

"As for that matter," said Mr. Seacroft who had ceased for a moment his restless looking about him, "there is plenty of information extant."

"Do you know its ancient history, grandpa?" questioned Miss Seacroft.

"A little of it—a little," responded the old gentle-

man rather evasively. "The bare facts in a comparatively new country like this are seldom hard to obtain. Old title-deeds, traditions, and personal reminiscences are usually relied upon to make history."

"Of course, grandpa; but, isn't there a romance of history? For instance, isn't there a story connected with that young lady's portrait? The handsome cavalier, or some of the others?"

The old gentleman's countenance fell slightly and he looked disturbed.

"Very likely, my dear," he said, with a sigh, "there is a story and stories."

"I thought so!" cried the Prima Donna, triumphantly; "and if we knew them we would find the old place holds more secrets than one. Can't you tell us one of them?"

The old man had grown quite grave and his face had lost its boyish expression.

"I might, my dear," he said, gently, regarding her with a glance of great tenderness. "I might—but not now."

"But why not?" persisted Miss Seacroft, with childlike whimsicalness, "why not?"

"Because the story is not yet finished, my darling. It would be only what you call the prologue, with the first and second acts perhaps, and the last yet to come," he said, with marked gravity, quite unlike his usual manner. "Let us go down," he added, abruptly.

They finished looking through the lower rooms, and in a few minutes were all outside, and walking up and down the rugged turf, observing where it sloped down to the ruinous old sea-wall on the inlet side, and where it terminated at the old shell road, beyond which was the beach.

At the further end of the grounds and nearest the ocean where the sea-wall had probably had its terminus, and where the water was evidently the deepest, was the ruinous foundation of what had once been a boat-house, or it might have combined both boat-house and a summer-house above it. Most of the main wall on the ocean side was standing, but with here and there a fracture that showed that at some period when high tides and fierce storms were abroad the waves dashed over it in considerably fury.

In the sky and atmosphere of the calm summer day, however, there was nothing to suggest storm or tempest. And with the tide out and the ruinous old stone-work on the land side bare to the foundation, nothing could present a pleasanter sea-coast picture for a painter's pencil, than did Cy Chaperone, in his improvised fishing-garb, perched on an angle of the old wall, when taken in connection with the adjuncts and surroundings. For, in addition to what I have described, just beyond him there was an old hulk stuck hard and fast in the mud, the deck of which at its highest point was scarcely more than three or four feet above the surface of the water; while the masts, though broken off at irregular lengths, were still standing and with her bow-sprit, from which rusty chains and frayed cordage were dropping piecemeal away, still served to give some faint idea of what a gallant ship it might have been once.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BABY THAT DRIFTED OUT TO SEA.

"CALM as the sea looks now," said Mr. Seacroft, in response to some remark of Alpine, "there have been periods when the storm and tides together have made terrible havoc along this coast. Years have elapsed since I have visited it, but I can recall events that have been made ever memorable to me."

His glance rested on his granddaughter.

There was a slight quaver in the old gentleman's voice, a sudden relapse from his boyish smile which was instantly recalled, however, as the young lady turned her loving eyes upon him.

"Events connected with this place?" she questioned.

"Yes," replied the old gentleman.

"Then there is no better time for us to hear them than now. I am sure that broad porch looks inviting. Let us seat ourselves in the good old-fashioned manner handed down by the Arabian Nights."

Grouping themselves about the old gentleman, whose apparent reluctance at last gave way to the air of entreaty reflected in all their faces, he began as follows:

"I shall not worry you with a long story as to how and why it happened that I should have been the captain of a vessel and at a point somewhere off this coast on a certain September night, more than twenty years ago, yet such was the fact. In those days we had no signal flags flying in every port to indicate at what time we should avoid going to sea, to escape storm and wreck, as nowadays, and we had left port that morning with every prospect apparently for a smooth voyage. But there was a rapid change in the afternoon, and at nightfall it had already begun to blow a gale that threatened a tempest. We did what every coastwise man does on such occasions. Housed all, made everything snug, battened down the hatches, lashed the portables, and as the wind was at first setting off shore were not greatly alarmed for the result. It began to change, however, and showed a fitfulness and fickleness that made it very uncertain whether we should blow high and dry on shore or out to sea, but I stood in as near as I dared and flung out an anchor. If Mr. Chaperone will be kind enough to hand me my glass from the basket yonder," interpolated the old gentleman, "perhaps I can give you a better idea of our bearings."

The glass was handed him and speedily adjusted, and the old man swept the horizon seaward with his glance.

"There, my dear," he said, holding it for his grand-

daughter to look, who in turn gave place to Alpine. "You see that point of land across the angle of the coast line?"

They assented.

"The inlet, broad as it looks over yonder, seems much less narrow to-day than it did then, and no doubt it is greatly changed as most sea-coasts are constantly changing. But we were very nearly in a line with that point and I was looking shoreward through my glass when I saw what appeared to be the roof and part of the framework of a summer-house drift out beyond the point, going out to sea with great velocity. This impression of what it was was such an extraordinary one that I looked again to see if I could be mistaken."

"A strange vessel to put to sea in," said Alpine, taking another glance across the water toward the point the old man had indicated.

"Yes. At first I hardly made it out, but as it rose and fell driving nearer and nearer, impelled by the fierce winds, I saw it was what I first conjectured. At the rate it was drifting I had only to await its approach and be prepared to fend off if there was danger of collision. It bore down close under our bow, and going forward with the glass I saw that it was indeed a summer-house but on her beam-ends, and that in the angle of the roof lay a bundle of something that I could not clearly make out. It looked like a child."

An exclamation of surprise greeted this announcement.

"I had on board," resumed the old gentleman, "an old sailor who had been a whaler, and his skill and experience in throwing the harpoon was available then. At my suggestion he stood ready with a small grapnel which he threw with such success as to catch one of the projecting timbers. The line might not have held, but we instantly reinforced it with another and another, when we were able to warp the strange wreck along-side. But the strangest of all strange things was the precious bundle lifted out of the angle of the roof where it had been caught and held fast by a brace of timbers which imprisoned it high and almost dry on the uppermost side."

The old gentleman paused and glanced at his granddaughter. She was watching him intently—her eyes large and luminous.

"It was a baby," she said, softly, in anticipation.

"Yes, my dear—yes, Mr. Alpine"—affirmed the old gentleman, his boyish face gleaming with pleasure. "It was a baby—a dear girl baby, and when I lifted it out of its lucky imprisonment, and unwrapped it, it awoke and began to cry in a most healthy way. Fortunately there were lady passengers on board, and the first officer had his wife with him, so that the little one was promptly taken care of. With the rescue of the child we cut loose from the wrecked summer-house and that was the last of it so far as we were concerned, for though the wind blew tremendously all night it abated in the morning, and by night we were leagues away, bearing the little stranger with us."

Miss Seacroft rose impulsively as he concluded his story, and flinging her arms around his neck gave him a resounding kiss.

"That is but the faintest shadow of the thanks I feel for your story, grandpa," she breathed; "though I think, as you intimated, it is hardly more than the prologue of what you could tell."

"But, oh, it was a terrible thing," exclaimed Mrs. Chaperone, "and if my dear C. had been living—"

"But as he isn't, my good Mrs. Chaperone," said the old gentleman, cheerfully, "let us go and see how Cy is getting on with his fishing."

"Very well, sir," responded Mrs. Chaperone, with a sigh of resignation, looking at her watch. "It is nearly time for the carriage to return for us, however, and we will have to be getting ready for our departure."

"Time enough, time enough," briskly responded Mr. Seacroft, leading the way down the slope.

Midway the old gentleman suddenly paused.

"You see it?" he asked, pointing to the foundation stones, and the old sea wall, where the boy was perched. "I traced the wrecked summer-house to this point. Yonder was where it was inundated, and thence the girl baby drifted out to sea."

CHAPTER XIV.

A CONFERENCE.

THE Alpine mansion at Washington Heights never presented a lovelier picture in its exterior adornments and surroundings than it did on that summer day.

With the warm sunshine lying full upon its grassy terrace, and the shadows from many waving trees and shrubbery going and coming on the winding walks and flowery parterres, there was a beauty to delight the eye, and enrap the senses like the calm and quiet of a perpetual Sabbath.

To Mrs. Alpine, however, standing at one of the drawing-room windows, and restlessly drumming with her fingers, this sense of quietude did not reach.

She was alone in the luxurious apartment, and was anxiously waiting, it would seem, for the appearance of some one, for from time to time she turned and looked expectantly toward the inner apartment, and as the delay continued, she grew more and more impatient. Once or twice she moved in that direction as if to seek desired information, but as often restrained her steps, returning again to the window and assuming a calmness that she was evidently far from feeling.

A lady of admirable self-possession and equipoise, as Mrs. Alpine undoubtedly was, the events of last night's occurrence, and the startling mysteries they concealed, had given a shock to her sensitive nerves. Though hidden from Mr. Alpine and the household,

THE WIFE'S SECRET.

there had been that in the recent occurrences to set her heart and brain on fire to a greater extent than they knew.

Her suspense and anxiety was at length rewarded by the appearance of the housekeeper.

"How is she, Mrs. Wigsmith?" she questioned, anxiously going toward her.

"There is no change since morning, when the influence of the drug was first thrown off. She still talks in the same unconscious way."

"Has the doctor gone?"

"Not yet, he is talking with Mr. Alpine in the dining-room."

"Then I will go up to her—she must not be left alone for a moment. Say to Mr. Alpine, as you go out, that I am with her."

And with the words she ascended the broad flight of stairs, and entered a chamber on the second floor, from which the light was mostly excluded.

Mrs. Alpine paused a moment in the open doorway, and glanced searchingly into the chamber.

Iola lay upon the bed, her fair face flushed, hair disheveled, and a feverish light in her eyes. She was wholly oblivious of Mrs. Alpine's presence, and her utterances were those of delirium.

"My poor darling," cried Mrs. Alpine, gliding to her side and clasping her in her arms. "Who is it you wish?"—for Iola in her wandering words kept repeating a name.

"Another—another," she repeated; "Seacroft—Grace Seacroft. Cruel, cruel."

Mrs. Alpine seized her hand and with her own fair face against that of the girl tried to soothe her with loving words and caresses. And not in vain.

The wandering words gradually became less and less frequent, the stifled sobs less convulsive, and she gathered herself into Mrs. Alpine's arms with her head upon her matronly bosom, like a weary child, until at last she fell asleep.

For some time they continued thus, until the entrance of the housekeeper, who carefully readjusted the pillows and aided in placing her gently back upon them, while whispering that Mr. Alpine was waiting below.

With a final glance at Iola, which had in it all of a mother's affection and tenderness, Mrs. Alpine glided down the stairs and joined her husband who was pacing up and down in the embrasure of a large bay window.

With his customary chivalrous courtesy he came forward, and taking both her hands in his led her to a seat.

"She is better, I think," said Mr. Alpine; "at least the doctor said there would be improvement—is it so?"

"To the extent of her sleeping," replied Mrs. Alpine. "Like a tired child she fell asleep with her head upon my bosom."

"Dear heart," commented Mr. Alpine sympathetically: "we may then hope that her mind will be calmer when she wakes."

"But there is a mystery, a strange mystery," asserted Mrs. Alpine.

"How she could have encountered those wretches in those unoccupied rooms?" questioned Mr. Alpine. "It seems plain. The police made a further and more careful examination, but have been unable to discover anything more than was previously reported. Iola must have gone into the garden, poor girl, in her anguish and excitement and left the door open, whence the burglars entered."

"It was not that entirely that I referred to. I observed, just now, that Iola kept repeating incoherently the name of Seacroft—Grace Seacroft—a name entirely unknown to me, and probably to you?"

"Yes," assented Mr. Alpine reflectively. "I recall no lady of that name; but—it seems a singular coincidence—I received a letter yesterday signed Seacroft, Edward Seacroft, containing a proposition concerning his granddaughter, which I had intended to have shown you last night. It was that letter that I was discussing with Bookout in the library."

"Did Iola know of this?" questioned Mrs. Alpine.

"No—not a word had been uttered to any one save Bookout, and he had not referred to it."

"Have you the letter?"

"No; I regret to have to say that I have not; but I shall see him to-day. I thought probably he would be here by this time."

"A proposal you say—of what nature?"

"I so regret not having it to show you," replied Mr. Alpine with an air of some annoyance; "but in substance it set forth that the writer, now seemingly in good health for an old man of seventy, has a chronic disease of the heart and feeling himself liable to die suddenly at any moment, desired to place his granddaughter—whose age by the way he did not state—under the guardianship of some well-known gentleman like myself. He represented that she is heir to certain property by which she would be wholly independent. My reputation, he was pleased to say, was such that he urgently desired that I should accept this position as guardian and trustee."

"And you have accepted?" she asked.

"Oh, no; not yet. I wished first to consult you, though I have given the papers to Bookout with instructions to make inquiry as to the respectability and standing of the parties. The property so far as he has mentioned does not seem specially valuable or desirable, being mainly an old dilapidated estate lying just below the city on the Jersey coast, known as The House on the Marsh."

"The House on the Marsh!"

The lady started suddenly as she thus echoed her husband's words and dropped a handkerchief she held in her hand, which Mr. Alpine, with his accustomed gallantry, sprung up to restore.

She passed the delicate fabric of lace and cam-

brie over her face for a minute or two before she again spoke.

"A strange request—a very strange request—from a stranger to a gentleman of your position," she finally remarked, speaking very slowly. "It is so like you to take ample time for thought before deciding, though my first impulse would be, with my desire to save you from care"—and her white hand stole gently into his as she spoke—"I should have certainly said no—no. But perhaps you are wiser to take time before saying it."

Mr. Alpine looked slightly surprised at her apparent objection, but gratified at her consideration for his cares and responsibilities.

"You would, then, advise me against the acceptance of such a trust?"

"I should hardly think it necessary to place it in that light," said Mrs. Alpine. "The fact you mention of an old, dilapidated estate, while of course in nowise objectionable in itself, perhaps, would seem to indicate neglect and instability of character on the part of the owners."

"True, my dear, true. Still, I specially cautioned Bookout, and he would well understand without, that our inquiries must be rigid."

"That being the case, and very doubtful of meeting with prompt and satisfactory responses, little more need be said about the proposition. Yet it seems singular that Iola should have repeated the same name as if with dread. But I must go to her again," she added, as the clock rung out the hour.

Rising as she spoke, and glancing out of the window, an undefined change passed over her face.

"Yonder is Mr. Bookout coming up the walk," she said; "your surmise was correct."

Mr. Alpine's countenance brightened up, and he rose at once and waved his hand in temporary adieu, as they left the drawing-room by opposite doors.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MISSING LINK.

MRS. ALPINE hurried down the hall, and surprised his visitor by giving him admittance himself.

The lawyer's first words after shaking hands were for Iola.

"Asleep," responded Mr. Alpine, "with prospects of the improvement sleep brings. But it has been a wretched business. Police and doctors going and coming, and the whole house upset. Things, I hope, will soon settle down to a calmer condition; but for this affair I should have been down-town this morning. But you do not look as well as usual."

"I?" questioned Mr. Bookout, with a little start of surprise, for coming as he did from that momentous interview with Ned Alpine and the sinister French *danseuse*, his first thought was of them. His countenance preserved its usual calm. "No," he admitted. "That is very natural, too, with the papers ringing from one end of the city to the other with this outrage at your house, to say nothing of the terrible disappointment to us all of that matter of yesterday."

Mr. Alpine's face clouded and grew dark.

"We shall survive it," he declared in a tone of stern bitterness.

While speaking Mr. Alpine conducted the lawyer into the library, and he now pushed an easy-chair toward him and took another himself.

The declining sun threw a warm glow in at the lofty windows and was reflected back from the hundreds and thousands of handsome volumes that lined the spacious apartment.

Mr. Bookout drew his chair up to the broad table in the center of the room and took out a large pocketbook.

"I knew you would not forget my mention of the discovery I had made," he said, taking out a paper, "and I have brought a copy of the missing link, if we may so term it, with me. As it is copied in my cramped and angular hand I may as well read it; and without waiting for assent he proceeded to do so:

"Married, Nov. 4, 1710, Sir James Alpine, of Alpine Manor, to Grace, only child of Edward Seacroft, Mariner, of Riverside; signed by the pastor and duly witnessed."

"That is a prize," commanded Mr. Alpine. "The Sir James mentioned is he of whom we heard so much while making our search on the English coast, and sometimes, I am afraid, not always to his credit. Married the child of Edward Seacroft. Good heavens!" he added, with a sudden start. "Do you observe, Bookout, that is the same name as that of the man who sends the proposal?—see!"

"Yes; I observe it now that my attention is drawn to it. Merely a coincidence, of course, my dear Mr. Alpine; notice the date, 1710. More than one hundred and sixty years ago."

"But this Seacroft who writes me might possibly be a descendant—the name is not common hereabouts. We must investigate it. How remarkable it would be if this stranger should turn out to be even a remote relative. I am greatly interested. We must compare notes with the party."

"You have not, I suppose, advised with Mrs. Alpine in the matter?" questioned the lawyer.

A slight annoyance was perceptible on the features of Mr. Alpine.

"Why—yes, I have; very briefly, however. The fact was"—drawing his chair a little nearer to that of the lawyer—"that Iola in a flighty way kept repeating the name Seacroft—Seacroft, as if in some measure attributing her troubles to it. A mere phantasy, of course, but Mrs. Alpine mentioning the matter as something strangely mysterious, I was reminded of the letter and the proposal."

"Did she think favorably of it?" asked Mr. Bookout.

"To tell the truth, no. She seemed to think it would be assuming care and responsibility on my part on behalf of persons of whom I knew nothing. But this copy of the missing registry leaf, for which we searched so long abroad, throws an entirely new light on the matter, as being at least a remarkable coincidence worth searching out, and one almost certain to enlist her interest; for between ourselves, although she has never shown any deep desire in the matter further than that my researches should be successful, she yet understands how gratifying it would be to me to complete the successive links in the family history."

And, rising as he spoke, he went to an ornamental safe, which was built in with the shelving on one side of the library, and, unlocking it, brought out two elaborately bound volumes in manuscript.

"For more than thirty years I have made the gathering of these facts a special object, as you know, and naturally I look upon this acquisition as in some degree the keystone of the arch which we have been building. We must see this Seacroft," he continued, with animation, "and perhaps—"

So interested was Mr. Alpine in the theme under discussion that he had not heard the footstep of his wife, who had softly entered and now laid her hand upon his arm, giving a formal bow of recognition to the lawyer.

"You are just in time, my dear," he declared, pushing forward a chair. "Our friend, Mr. Bookout, has at length succeeded in securing that important link in the family record, of which you have heard so much."

Mrs. Alpine smiled at the reference in a manner that suggested to the lawyer that she had possibly heard quite too much regarding her husband's special hobby.

"But it is not alone the fact of the discovery," he continued; "the mystery of that name uttered by Iola is deepened. Look at the registry leaf, or rather Mr. Bookout's copy."

The lady glanced at the paper spread out before her.

"I remember the name of Sir James Alpine very well from hearing your discussion of it, but the name Seacroft is strange—and Grace, too—that was the name that Iola uttered," she added, examining the paper more closely.

She looked intently at the lawyer.

"Where is the original of this paper?" she asked.

"Secure in my safe at the office."

"Bookout deems it too precious to risk," suggested Mr. Alpine.

"How could Iola have heard that name?" she questioned, addressing herself directly to the lawyer.

"Impossible to say," he responded, briefly; "but as I have before remarked—a coincidence."

"To me," said the lady decisively, "there is something ominous in it—ominous!" with a slow gesture that impressed Mr. Alpine.

"Do not proceed further in this matter," she continued addressing her husband; "I fear—I fear that you will find imposture and villainy lurking beneath it."

"And yet the manner in which the paper came into my possession is simple enough," said Bookout. "It might have been produced long ago but for having been overlooked. It was among old papers belonging to an estate, and I think there can be no question of its genuineness."

"So far as you are concerned, of course not." But Mr. Alpine has made no secret of his desire to secure this evidence, or of his willingness to pay largely for it. Whether acceptable or not he will of course judge. But it is the other matter I especially refer to. As I have already suggested to him, in the burden of responsibility sought to be thrust upon him his acceptance would be most unwise."

"But, my dear, there would be no harm in further inquiry—in seeing the party?"

"Merely a trouble that had better be avoided. I should suggest that Mr. Bookout respond declining with thanks."

"Had I entertained the possibility of an objection," said Mr. Alpine, "I could easily have taken the course you wish, but I am afraid it is a little too late."

"Yes," said Mr. Bookout. "I have arranged to meet the writer at my office to-morrow; and from there if time permitted, or at some future period"—he added slowly—"I thought we would visit the old property in question now called—"

Mrs. Alpine rose suddenly with her hand raised for silence.

"Hark! was not that a sound from Iola's chamber? Pardon my abrupt withdrawal from your conference—as unceremonious as my entrance," and with a wafture of the white hand she hurried away.

She closed the door behind her, crossed the drawing room and ascending the stairway paused a moment to glance into Iola's chamber where the young girl was quietly sleeping while the housekeeper watched by her side, and then passed on—going into her own apartments.

Once in her own room with the door locked, the rigid self-possession she had maintained gave way.

"At last, at last!" she murmured—"after all these years"—wringing her hands and walking up and down in extreme agitation; "is the blow to fall? Oh, if I could have told the truth—the terrible truth—at that time, what hours of agony would have been spared me. But, no; it would have been the knell of love and—of hope. *The House on the Marsh!* Can it be, as Bookout asserts, a coincidence? No, no. Is it not rather evidence of his craft? Yet what does he know? Oh how, through all these years, that dark period comes back to me! It was

the year of his European absence when that frightful storm arose; the incoming tide had undermined the foundation of the old summer-house in which the children were wont to play. For two hours they had been left locked in by their attendant—whose duty it was to be with them, while she went—what matters it now where? A chubby boy of four, a girl of two.

"A platform leading to the building overturned at the moment of my approach and the summer-house itself began to settle and sink into the rising waters. At imminent risk I dashed across the moving timbers—in at the open window, caught up one child and out again, returning for the other at still greater peril. Too late! The building with a sudden crash overturned and was swept away. What could I do? I dared not face the consequence of neglect. The mother already a hopeless invalid—the father soon expected to bear us away to the mountains. Grief and tears do not bring back the dead. Who should condemn my action? One mother's heart at least was saved a pang! And mine? Ah, why these tears? Well, well! Shall not all I have suffered plead for me or am I now to lose all worth living for? Why should an impression so strong of evil come to me? What have I to fear from their visit to the old House on the Marsh? Nothing, nothing!—Or why seek to prevent its coming into their possession—for as I have sometimes dreamed—"

She paused and did not finish the thought aloud.

CHAPTER XVI.

O WEN'S SCHEMES.

ABOUT the same hour that Mrs. Alpine, in the privacy of her elegant apartments, was defining a half-expressed fear of the purposed visit to the old House on the Marsh—something was transpiring down-town which requires our attention.

In a small office on an upper floor, in a locality convenient to the money center of Broad and Wall streets, Douglass Owen was walking up and down in a manner that betokened that his scheming mind was far from being at ease.

A woman thickly veiled, who had been having a business interview with him, as appeared from his subsequent remarks, had just taken her departure and his natural irritation had not been greatly benefited thereby.

"It is useless to expect that hook to hold very long, and I have done the wisest thing in urging her departure out of Bookout's way. Keen as he is, and fool as she may be, there is no trusting that cord to bind for any length of time; I must have some stronger hold than that. The plan I have thought out will do it effectually, and the risks are as nothing compared to what I shall gain. At present everything hangs on the breath of this woman, and though bound to my interest by her necessities she would be as readily bound to somebody else by a larger offer. If Bookout really had an inkling of the truth, my cheerful prospects would be at an end, for though inclined to hold a taut rein he is still disposed to advance my interest with Iola, and that is a part that must not be hazarded. Yet, money I must have. Broker & Co. tell me that the last dollar of margin on Lake Shore and Union is wiped out, and that my venture in petroleum stocks has left me considerably in their debt, which must be made good at once. My little blind of business here—"

He paused a moment to glance bitterly around the room at the meager furnishing, and at the transom over the door, where could be seen through the glass in inverted letters, in addition to his name, the rather fictional legend:

"DEALER IN BONDS AND STOCKS."

"This," he resumed, "has not served in the last six months to pay for my lodging, and the little profit it has brought me has diminished to nothing. No—money I must have, and an opportunity is now given me to get it, and at the same time crush my rival. It must be done at once as Ned will, no doubt, leave by the next steamer. I know where old Frazier Alpine keeps his principal bank account, and Ned checks at the Continental. The thing is very simple. A draft from Frazier Alpine in Ned's favor, for, say \$5,000, must be duly certified and deposited at Ned's bank to draw against. Luckily I remember that precisely this amount was so deposited when Ned went abroad last—the old gentleman insisting upon making him a birthday present."

While uttering these last words Owen had seated himself at a desk and began to overhaul the papers.

From a drawer, he took several blank checks, and selecting a pen with great care, began to fill one of them up. When he came to the signature he paused, and taking a letter from his pocket—which was merely a formal note of business thanking him for some information about stocks—he spread it out before him, made a careful examination of the signature with a magnifying glass which he took from the desk, and after two or three attempts on blank slips of paper, copied it on the filled-out check.

"A neat stroke of business," he declared, comparing the two with the magnifier. "Equal to the original and better."

Taking another blank check on Ned's bank, and selecting a different ink, he rapidly filled it out for \$4,000, writing the signature—"Edw. Alpine" with a complex flourish.

"Fortunately I have seen his way of doing business so often there is no extreme care necessary as in the case of the old man."

He gave himself no time for hesitation, but rising with promptness went to a wardrobe standing in one corner of the room from which he took a sportsman's coat and hat, which he quickly exchanged for those he had on.

"Strange, that so slight a thing should make so great a change," he commented, surveying himself in the glass. "Ned little fancied when he left these

old traps here, before he went abroad, that I should some day make good use of them."

Putting the checks in a large bank envelope with other papers, he unfastened the door and let himself out, locking it behind him.

He was gone not more than twenty minutes, when he came hurriedly up-stairs, two steps at a time and somewhat out of breath, and gave himself admittance.

Not till he had locked the door did he pause or look behind him, and then the lurking fear that is the sleuth-hound of all criminal acts, made itself apparent in his searching glance about the room.

"Done," he muttered, "and well done," with nervous trepidation in his voice, as he proceeded to dispossess himself of the sportsman's garb and replace it with his own.

"It was even easier than I thought. Discovery is impossible until the last of the month at least, when the books are written up, at which time Ned will be on the opposite side of the water, and whatever course the old man takes he will be sure to justify himself by letting Ned's crime be known to his family; in any event it will forever kill his chances with Iola; and after all, that is the main thing with me. Lie there, hostage to fortune!"

And as he spoke he threw the money he had obtained on the desk.

"If I had had that last night," he resumed, "not even my pursuer should have prevented my taking her with me, and she would have been saved this wretched encounter with burglars. But let us go slow. Though I have not much confidence in Bookout's aid, yet I must make him think I have. This business," waving his hand toward the money, "will effectually kill Ned off and create an impassable gulf between him and the old man that time cannot bridge; and that is necessary. I hate him—I hate him!" he added with fierce jealousy, striking his hands together with noiseless force, as if they would deal death-blows that could not be heard.

"In spite of his careless indifference in keeping abroad so long and his rejection of her at the altar, the girl is ready to dare all things for him. She loves him—loves him, yet. Gods! if she only loved me like that!"

He smote his hands with emphatic gesture and strode up and down with a fierce glow of passion coming and going on his dark face.

"But it shall end in my favor. I will try every art and artifice to win her by fair means, and taken in the rebound her heart should be easy to conquer—yet if these efforts fail, I will—"

He paused abruptly, looked about him with a guarded expression, and slowly added with the emphasis of irrevocable determination:

"I will not say what I will—but she shall be mine! This, however," he continued in a milder tone, "is only the last resort. High-toned as the old man is in his unimpeachable integrity, he is not likely to stand in his adopted daughter's way in opposing her marriage, after her being rejected by his son, and he dishonored beyond all possible redemption. The prospect will certainly be A1 for me. No, I must play the fox rather than the wolf."

He placed a portion of the money in his pocket, and the rest in a small iron safe, muttering as he did so: "This is the first time there has been a dollar in it for a month."

He then proceeded to improve his appearance by some additions from the wardrobe—his half-muttered reflections indicating some definite purpose in his mind.

"I can stop at Bookout's as I go up and inquire as to Iola's condition and make an impression on the old lawyer at the same time." He was on the point of going out when he was startled by a sudden knock at the door.

So seldom was business in the habit of coming his way that it was an innovation to the routine of the day's dullness.

He moved toward the door to open it when a latent thought of his recent transaction, and the possible consequences it involved, caused a sudden pallor to sweep across his dark visage. With a noiseless backward step he swiftly pulled out a drawer seizing a pistol which lay within, and thrust it in his breast.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VISITOR.

THERE was a second knock at the door.

He opened it.

Whether he breathed more freely on seeing and recognizing his visitor is hard to determine.

For it was Edward Alpine.

"Ah! Ned Alpine," he exclaimed. "This is a surprise. Come in. I intended calling on you to-day. When will you sail?"

"Not until Saturday," responded Alpine cordially entering and shaking hands.

"Glad to see you, but never thought you would find your way up here. How long will you remain abroad?"

"An indefinite period; I shall not probably return for years. The little fortune that was left me was mostly invested in London, and you may be glad to know that it has grown on my hands—thanks to wiser heads than mine that made the investment. Though not large it will suffice—for my personal needs."

Owen expressed his satisfaction, for anything that insured his rival's continued absence abroad would conduce to the success of his plans and purposes here; and yet it excited his wrath and ire that this lordly idler should be so much better placed in the world, as he deemed it, than himself.

"You were born under a lucky star," he declared in a tone that disguised his real feelings from his visitor.

"That is the stereotyped phrase of the day," asserted Alpine, gravely—"but in my case it has no foundation in fact. I have, as you know, lost all worth living for."

He sighed wearily as he spoke, and rising from his chair took a turn or two up and down the room, quite unmindful of the evil glances following him.

"So," he exclaimed pausing and looking about him—"this is where you still hold forth. I thought perhaps I would find you moved, but concluded to risk a run up. I have been down on the Jersey coast to-day to an old place called The House on the Marsh, with a party whose invitation I could not well refuse, and am on my way up town."

"I remember the old place," said Owen. "I was down there last year gunning and fishing. Is it occupied?"

"Not yet; but the party I was with, who are the owners, have had it repaired and talk of moving in next week. But this don't interest you. Have you seen Mr. Bookout to-day?"

"No, I thought of calling there on my way home—you saw the paragraph in the paper, I suppose, about that affair at the mansion?"

"Yes—and that was one reason why I wished to see you."

Owen braced himself up strongly, very doubtful of what was coming.

"From that paragraph I judged you could not have taken her—Iola—into the house?"

"Certainly not. It was her request that I leave her at the gate," replied Owen, in a silent rage with himself that he had done so. For what an opportunity he had lost to win the young girl's gratitude. Possibly he would have encountered the burglars and put them to flight.

Alpine sighed, and resumed the chair from which he had arisen.

"It is a matter for future regret—like all the rest of it," he said; "but she is the central figure uppermost in my mind. I am anxious—very anxious—to hear something of her condition. Suppose you go up there and make inquiry?"

"I would be very glad to—serve you," said Owen in jealous surprise at what he looked upon as an evident intention of clinging to the girl in defiance of what had occurred.

Alpine noticed his hesitation.

"There would be nothing extraordinary in your calling, Owen, basing your action upon the item in the papers. You would probably only see the house-keeper, and my name would not be mentioned."

"I shall call if you wish it," said Owen, reluctantly, after a moment's reflection; "but I am bound to say that my reception yesterday from your father was not of the kind to stimulate any special efforts in that direction. He would not even receive the message with which I sought to soften the blow."

"What did he say?" asked young Alpine, in a constrained voice.

"He was more vehement and stormy than you ever saw him. A perfect tiger!—in the first outburst of his passion your life would hardly have been worth a button!"

"So fierce as that?"

"Yes. And now I remember, he shouted: 'Tell him he is no longer my son!' and ordered me 'away!' in wrath and scorn, with other words I was too much disturbed to remember."

"It is another regret added to the load I already bear," commented Alpine, "that you should have suffered for my sake. And she—and she—did she say nothing?"

"Fell as if stricken with death," cried Owen, unspuriously, anxious to color the picture all through—"fell as if dead into Mrs. Alpine's arms."

Edward Alpine's face was turned away and his strong frame shook with anguish.

"And you saw her no more?" he questioned, after a minute or two had elapsed, with his face still turned away.

"Yes; she came into the hall just as I was leaving where Mr. Bookout had followed me, bearing herself like a queen, whose crown had been insulted, and gave me a ring which she ordered me to give you. Here it is," producing it as he spoke.

Alpine reached out his hand mechanically with his gaze still averted, and the other dropped the ring into it.

There was a glow of exultation in Owen's manner which the unhappy young man did not observe. The fierce jealousy that flamed in his dark face at every thought of Iola's love for Alpine, gave way for the moment to an expression of triumph.

For some moments silence ensued.

"Under the circumstances, then, I say no more about your calling," said Alpine, at length. "Though I was desirous of obtaining the very latest news from the house."

"I had already determined calling on Mr. Bookout as I went up-town, and shall of course inquire what information he has, and if you wish will report to you in the evening."

"I shall be obliged to you, Owen, if you will do so," said Alpine, rising with some weariness of manner. "It will only add another to the obligations that your work of last night laid me under."

Owen flushed at this praise which he so well knew was far from being deserved; and Alpine on his part remembering the unfounded suspicions—as he now regarded them—he had last night entertained, was anxious to make amends.

"There are so few nowadays worthy of trust," he added, "that while anything like deviation from the direct course creates suspicion, those who safely pass the ordeal are all the more honored."

"You are lavish of your words to-day," said Owen, recovering his composure with an effort, and a sudden gleam of cunning in his eye, that his visitor did not see.

"I only regret that I was unable to do more, but since you are so good as to mention it, there is one thing that occurs to me. Mr. Bookout of course knew nothing of my taking the young lady home at your request; it is just possible that when he hears of it, as it is almost certain he will on Miss Marl's recovery, that he might be inclined to blame me. In such case a line from you would do me good service, to the effect that it was by your order and at your request that I have done what I have, and that in short you assume the consequences of my acts."

"Of course, if you wish it," said Alpine, with apparent surprise; "nothing is easier; but I don't suppose you will have any trouble. Give me a pen."

He drew a sheet of paper before him, and dashed off a few lines, which he read, as follows:

"It was at my request and at my desire that Douglass Owen has done what he has. I assume the entire consequences of his acts. EDW. ALPINE."

"There! will that do?"

Owen's eyes sparkled with a dangerous light which, however, he hastened to veil from observation by bending over to look at the paper.

"Just the thing," he replied. "Of course it may not be necessary. But thrice armed is he who has the wherewith when it is necessary—as some poet did not say."

"I shall see you to-night, then?" questioned Alpine, preparing to depart; and having received an answer in the affirmative, with a brief good-by, he took his departure.

Owen waited until his footsteps died away and a sardonic smile curled his lips.

"A splendid thought that," he asserted, looking at the paper young Alpine had given him. "He assumes the consequences of all my acts. While in a legal point of view it would not shield me, perhaps, from some things, yet it would be sure to have weight and consideration with Frazier Alpine—should it ever become necessary for me to put it to the test."

He carefully placed the paper away in his pocket and let himself out, locking the door behind him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GHOSTLY NIGHT.

MR. JAMES BOOKOUT did not return to his bachelor quarters in the city that evening.

The conversation between himself and Mr. Alpine in the library, had been so extended, that the lawyer yielded to the urgent request of his friend and client and remained to supper; devoting the half-hour succeeding in going over the disused wing, the scene of the last night's startling adventure.

Later in the evening, finding a general air of restlessness pervading the whole household, from the stately Mr. Alpine himself and his fair wife, to the bell boy who opened the door, he succumbed to solicitous requests and concluded to occupy for the night the room always at his disposal in the mansion.

As a natural consequence of this, Douglass Owen did not see the lawyer at his office as he had expected, and did not obtain the latest information to bring to Ned Alpine.

The weather during the day had been unusually fair, but toward nightfall there was a lowering of clouds on the horizon, a misty vapor rolling up from the fields and river, and a diminution of the sun's rays that denoted a probable storm.

With the final disappearance of the sun and the coming on of darkness the rising wind began to lift the branches and shrubbery surrounding the mansion in a manner that gave the terraces and lawns a widely different aspect from what they presented with the sun full upon them in the earlier day.

It threw a gloom over the house and grounds that proved somewhat disturbing to the superstitious fears of the servitors of the household.

"A ghostly night, William," said Mrs. Wigsmith, the housekeeper, to the footman, a man of florid face and visage, whom she had ordered to accompany her on her round of duties in closing up for the night. "A night for disturbing elements—for ghosts."

"Ho, ma'am, hi don't like to hear you say that—the very hidea makes my solid flesh creep."

"Nevertheless, it is true," affirmed Mrs. Wigsmith with grim satisfaction at the apparent tremor of the footman. "A man of your tried courage should have no fear of ghosts," she continued, placing great emphasis on the word that appeared to so disturb the footman.

"Ho, not at all, ma'am, hi 'ave often seen them in the old country. My heyes! what was that?" with a start and a jump that took him nearly through the doorway.

"Only a bat that has got in through the open window," responded the housekeeper, grimly. "There, he has gone out—close the shutter and don't stand there staring at me."

"Yes, ma'am. Hit's all right, ma'am. But that haffair of last night d'ye know, ma'am, was hanough to upset the 'ouse for some time to come."

"Never mind about the affair of last night, William," said Mrs. Wigsmith severely, "but go on with the closing up."

And so, without further words, and perhaps awed into silence by the ghostly elements he dreaded, the footman marshaled the way light in hand.

Mr. Bookout walking up and down leisurely, first in the spacious drawing-room, then on the porch, then again in the library, while left temporarily to himself, noted—like a man with a keen sixth sense, of observation, this and other instances that confirmed his impressions of the restless and untenable feeling that was abroad.

"It will take some time to get things settled down into the old channel of calm placidity," he remarked to Mr. Alpine as that gentleman entered the library.

"Yes, yes," assented Mr. Alpine with unusual force of manner. "It has been a miserable business from first to last. As I told you before, the house has been completely upset. I shall look to you, my good friend, to help us through. Mrs. Alpine, dear soul, is so inexplicably disturbed, that she will hardly join us again this evening. What with her constant attendance on Iola, and the extra care entailed I am exceedingly anxious for her sake. She is not accustomed to excitements of this or, indeed, any other kind. If we only had the making of the world—you and I, Bookout—it seems to me that we should order things quite differently."

"Yes," responded the lawyer with emphasis. "That is certain—at least if we did not, it should not be for want of trying."

"Still, as we are now in for it," resumed Mr. Alpine with more cheerfulness of manner, we "must entertain ourselves, as we have done before on more auspicious occasions."

"Hark!" he added with his finger raised warningly, as a lurid flash threw a blinding glare on the darkness outside followed by a terrific burst of thunder. "See, my friend, the wisdom of my insisting on your remaining, besides the substantial benefit of your presence to us. Think what a dull journey you would have had of it going through the storm."

He pushed an easy-chair as he spoke toward the lawyer, and helped himself to another opposite.

"Do you feel like talking?" he asked.

Mr. Bookout elevated his eyebrows in response.

"I merely asked," continued Mr. Alpine, "because the sounds outside somehow seemed to enforce silence within, and that anything like discussion or argument might be distasteful."

"If prolonged—yes," said the lawyer; "and I confess that the sounds outside affect me in the same manner."

"Then my proposal is for chess," said Mr. Alpine, pulling out a handsomely inlaid chess-board and arranging the chess-men.

"Just the thing," responded the lawyer.

And so the two gentlemen sat down harmoniously to a sharply contested game, which lasted with little advantage to either till the clock struck eleven.

Looking up with astonishment, Mr. Alpine drew out his watch in confirmation of the hour, and proceeding to wind it, remarked with a half-suppressed yawn as he looked at the chess-board:

"It's the same old thing, Bookout. We are a strongly matched pair and may as well stop where we are. I was in hopes that Mrs. Alpine would have joined us but as she has not been able we must take her known wish to do so for the deed."

"Stay! do not ring the bell," said Mr. Bookout as his friend and host was about to do so. "I can find my way up without troubling the boy. The door is always on the latch."

"And will always be so to you, my friend," said Mr. Alpine with friendly warmth, as he shook hands and bade the counselor good-night.

"A splendid old mansion, worthy of the man who owns it," commented Mr. Bookout to himself as he ascended the broad stair-case; "still it seems to me"—with a shrug of the shoulders—"as though there was too much draught in the halls; suggesting colds, influenza, death. Quite unlike my snug little quarters. Still we must pay tribute to our position in the world, whatever it may be. Ah, here is the room, and certain to be well aired for the door is open."

He entered, closed the door, and turned up the light, glancing about him at the comfortable furnishing—the pictures on the wall and the attractive and reposeful bed.

"An excellent housekeeper, that Mrs. Wigsmith. Thoroughly understands her position, careful, attentive and—not the least of her virtues—wastes no words."

He removed his coat, turned down the snowy linen on the bed, flung off one or two of the extra pillows, and lowering the gas, went to the window and looked out.

A large tree outside projected some of the branches close to the sash, and a sudden gust of wind brought the leaves against the pane.

"I am not easily disturbed," he said, observingly; "but the gardener should exercise his skill here, for in a violent storm that tree and the rustling branches would bring all sorts of uncanny noises around one's ears. A dark night and a storm," he added, as he turned from the window and dropped the curtain.

He removed his boots and glanced about him. A pair of easy slippers conveniently placed attracted his attention.

"A model housekeeper," he murmured, "or is it Mrs. Alpine's forethought that has placed them here? No answer required; but they are satisfactory at least," he concluded, as he sat down in a large easy rocker and thrust his feet into them.

That the restlessness and disquiet pervading the household did not reach Mr. Bookout in his capacity of guest was quite apparent, and yet he showed no desire for sleep, or, indeed, of any present intention of going to bed; for he sat in his rocker slowly moving to and fro with his feet upon an ottoman and his head thrown back, with his glance sweeping the angle of the wall above the cornice over the door.

Inscrutable as he was at all times, there was no relaxation in features or in figure, that even now could have afforded the slightest index to the current of his thoughts.

Occasionally he raised his hand to his chin with that caressing motion for which he was sometimes noted, but his glance hardly wandered from the place where it first rested.

Even the intermittent gusts outside with the heavy drops of rain which murmured a somber melancholy

against the window, did not cause him to lift his head from his restful position.

Twelve o'clock sounded, and still he sat there.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE OF THE LAWYER'S SECRETS.

The last echo of the city clock had died away when, without moving from his position, he drew out his watch. Not to verify the hour, it would seem, for he did not glance at the face; nor yet to wind it, for he took out no key.

An ancient time-piece, this—with a double case opening in two parts, an interior and exterior—the inner spring of which he softly touched, when it flashed up like a thing of life.

It contained the portrait of a beautiful woman.

Mr. Bookout's gaze reverted to it and remained fixed as if there was a spell about it that could forever hold him silent, enthralled, and motionless. He seemed hardly to breathe, and under the influence of his face appeared to lighten, the hard lines to melt into tender softness, and an expression of undying faith, of ennobling trust, to lift and exalt his whole being.

"A daughter of the gods, divinely fair," he breathed to himself, after a few moments' silence. "She is like it still, in spite of all. But, back!" he muttered, with a start, like one who awakens to self-enforced activity. "When I am dead, should I die first, it may be known that I have it—that for years I have carried it about me—but not till then."

He shut the watch with a snap, placed it in his pocket, and, rising, went to the opposite side of the room, where hung an admirable life-size portrait of Mr. Alpine, by Thompson.

"Good art and a good likeness," he declared, examining the painting in all its details.

He then went to the large mirror over the mantle and stood looking at his image reflected in it.

"That likeness," he breathed, "is probably equally good, and yet"—with a cynical glance at the reflection—"what sort of a picture is that to impress any one? Bah!" and with this grim comment he began to walk noiselessly to and fro.

Evidently Mr. Bookout was in a peculiar frame of mind for one of his usual habits and temperament, for he still seemed d sinclined to sleep.

A large comfortable dressing-gown hung conveniently for his use, which he had not put on with the slippers, but he now proceeded to do so, in furtherance of some purpose which had taken hold of him.

"Matches, I shall need matches," he muttered.

He supplied himself from the safe on the shelf, turned the gas down to a mere star in the dark and went out into the hall.

With the easy certainty of one who knows a route he has traversed before, he passed down the long hall, turning once or twice to the right and left.

As he proceeded the soothings of the wind outside among the trees and about the angles of the house and cornices became more and more apparent.

Mr. Bookout paused a moment to listen, and his mind reverted for an instant to Iola. "A sad business," he muttered,—"inexpressibly sad."

He reached a door in the party wall. A glance at it showed him it was double bolted and a slight exclamation came to his lips as he glanced at them.

They were unfastened.

"Strange," he said, "that after all the excitement regarding this wing of the building, they should have neglected to have shov'd the bolts. I am afraid I shall have to recall some of my encomiums on Mrs. Wigsmith, though I suppose it is to be charged to the neglect of her assistant—the florid William."

While speaking he had softly opened the door and stepped through, shutting it noiselessly after him.

There was no appreciable difference in this part of the house and that he had left, save perhaps the ceilings were less lofty, and the halls not quite so spacious.

"They have taken the precaution to-night to light a gas-jet here," he commented, with some surprise, as he saw one dimly burning. "That is not specially objectionable, though useless, for lightning never strikes twice in the same place, and gas-light scares nobody. I must ascertain if any other theory besides that of burglars would be tenable—though it seems hardly possible—"

He did not finish the sentence but kept on through the halls glancing into one or two of the rooms where the doors were open, and making use of his matches, descended a flight of stairs to the floor below.

He reached the room where Iola had been found, when he paused a moment reflectively.

"A wild night out of doors," he declared, after going in, as a dash of rain fiercer than usual struck against the closed shutters, "and lonely enough inside for ghosts to walk if one believed in such superstitions."

He was in the act of passing into the next room when he saw a bright light stream in under the door. He softly entered.

A woman in white was standing in the middle of the apartment with a coil of wax taper burning in her hand.

It needed no second glance to tell him that it was Mrs. Alpine.

She was clad in some soft white garment which swept the floor and left her round fair arms bare to the elbows, while her hair, which was wonderful in its length and beauty, rippled over her dress like a wavy, misty vail, reaching nearly to the floor.

As Mr. Bookout entered her disengaged hand went swiftly to her lips with repressive action, as if she would suppress a shriek that startled nature sought to force from her.

But her recognition of the lawyer was equally

THE WIFE'S SECRET.

prompt with his of herself, and her hand fell slowly to her heart and remained pressed there with restraining force.

"Mr. Bookout," she breathed, in tones almost natural, but a startled look like a hunted deer at bay.

"Yes," he assented, with enforced calmness, moving toward her. "Like yourself, no doubt," in his customary matter-of-fact tone—"I was seeking to solve a doubt in my mind"—

The words died on his lips as the lady, rigid as death, seemed about to fall.

He sprung toward her, and seized the light from her trembling fingers.

Her glance was concentrated on the window, to ward which he had turned, where one of the shutters had been left open.

There was an expression on her face such as he had never seen—a shocked, agonized revelation that told this man of inscrutable mysteries that a knowledge which for years he had expected and dreaded, had come to her at last.

For, following her glance at the window, he saw a ghastly face, haggard and dark, with tangled masses of snaky hair about the swarthy features, for a single instant visibly pressed against the glass.

Every semblance of life dropped out of Mrs. Alpine's face, and the proud woman lay as if shocked by lightning, lifeless in the lawyer's arms.

But not for long.

With a convulsive start the inert limbs moved, her hands passed slowly over her heart, and her eyes opened on Mr. Bookout's face, bending sympathetically over her.

Something in the expression she saw there—an angelic in infinite tenderness and compassion—swept through her inmost nature.

Only a moment thus—and her strong, self-reliant equipoise rallied life's reluctant forces, and she was herself again.

She took up the wax-light.

"I will leave you to close the shutters, if you will," she said, with marked clearness of manner.

"The face which I imagined I saw there was, of course, only the phantasmagoria of overstrained nerves. Good-night."

Quietly opening the door, he watched her as she floated out of the room and out of sight, with his customary calm. Yet he knew, and she knew, that there would never again be quite the old distance between them. Nor on her part the dread that there had been.

For, in that one fateful, evanescent moment she had seen his soul.

CHAPTER XX.

EVENTS MOVE FORWARD.

On the following morning Mr. Alpine took a somewhat earlier breakfast than usual as his friend and adviser had expressed a desire to get to his office as early as practicable, and his view of the duties of host would not permit him to let his friend take the morning meal alone.

Mrs. Alpine did not make her appearance, but made amends for her absence by sending cheering reports from Iola's chamber of the much improved condition of the young girl; and also a brief message from the young girl herself to her dear adopted father, showing she was in full possession of her mind and faculties.

And so in a cheerful frame of mind, tempered in his stately way by due solicitude regarding the health of Mrs. Alpine, the two gentlemen breakfasted in a far more happy mood than that which had obtained at supper the night before.

The storm had cleared away from the face of nature, and in like manner Mr. Alpine's face had resumed its usual high-bred repose.

Beyond the natural congratulations befitting this change for the better, the conversation over the morning repast was rather desultory than otherwise—the counselor's utterance being mostly limited to monosyllabic responses.

In regard to the meeting with the Mr. Seacroft, in accordance with the written arrangement made by the lawyer, Mr. Alpine had no doubt now of his being able to be present; "although last night he had had serious misgivings," as he had declared when the two rose from the breakfast-table. The counselor might therefore rely upon his being prompt, and with a few brief words of leave-taking the lawyer hurried away.

Though it was somewhat earlier than his usual hour for business, when he arrived at his office, he found Douglass Owen already waiting here.

There was a slight contraction of Mr. Bookout's heavy brows as he saw and recognized his visitor. If his appearance was usually inscrutable it was far more so this morning—if such a thing were possible—and before a word could be spoken Owen felt it.

"I called upon you yesterday, sir," he began after the first formal greeting was over, "and did not find you in."

"That is very evident," interpolated the lawyer, "but you find me now—wherein can I be of service?" with marked formality of manner.

"It was not a matter of business, Mr. Bookout," began Owen, "although I do not forget that you have thrown some in my way of late—"

"No?—then, what?"

"The important thing I wish to ask," continued Owen, determined not to be kept at a distance, notwithstanding the abrupt manner of the lawyer—"was to inquire about Iola—Miss Marl. How is she?"

"Well, quite as well as could be expected, when I left there an hour ago."

"I am glad to hear that. Her encounter with burglars must have given her a great shock. I trust you do not think me assuming too much in being thus anxious?"

"No; certainly not. Very natural, with the feelings you entertain."

Owen looked relieved.

And after a few more words on unimportant matters he took his departure.

Mindful of his promise to Ned, but with motives quite different from those of friendship he proceeded to Alpine's hotel.

He found the young man in his room, but nervous, impatient and annoyed. But looking upon him as a friend the information he brought was welcome.

"Girls are all alike about such things," said Owen, oracularly, after having stated that Iola was again as well as usual. "Nothing disturbs them for any length of time. They are ready to be off with the old love and on with the new, at half a day's notice or less," eying Alpine very sharply, as the glance of the latter fell at the assertion.

"And perhaps it is just as well that it is so," he continued, "that they can be volatile and fickle."

"No—no," declared Alpine, emphatically; "you wrong the sex. Not lightly do they turn away from a deserving object. I—I—could make no complaint against her! Whatever she does or might do she can find a warrant for it all in the wretched course which, as you well know, has been forced on me. My only wish and prayer is that she may be happy."

"I merely wish to urge," said Owen, with a thinly disguised sneer, "that woman accepts the situation much quicker than man. Proof of which you have in her prompt return of the engagement ring which was a final ending so far as she was concerned. Iola's visit here afterward was a mere impulse, nothing more—to satisfy herself—which had she given the situation a moment's thought, was a step she would never have taken."

Alpine groaned.

"Enough. Do not discuss it," he exclaimed, and rising moved to the window.

"Two more days to wait," he resumed, after a moment. "I would they were over. Perhaps with the ocean rolling between us she will easier forget."

The dark eyes of his visitor glared at him with a jealous hatred but it passed unnoticed.

"There is nothing else that I can do for you, I suppose?" he questioned, preparing to go.

"No, Owen; many thanks for what you have done. I may, however, be in a position hereafter to reciprocate. I shall expect to see you again before I sail."

"Your passage is taken?"

"Yes. Look in to-night, if you are not too busy."

"Very well—I will make it a point to do so," and with these final words he was off.

Taking a stage he was soon down-town, and went direct to his office.

He was in the act of entering when a step coming toward him from the interior of the hall-way, caused him to turn in that direction.

He gave a start of surprise, for it was the veiled visiter who had taken her leave of him yesterday.

Before he could give expression to the thought that came uppermost she had reached him and followed him in.

She did not shut the door behind her, but Owen as if unwilling to have further intruders promptly closed it.

The woman threw back her vail disclosing the same features that Mr. Bookout had asked Edward Alpine if he wished to see.

"So," she breathed, in a resentful manner and in accent not so decidedly French as that she had exhibited in her interview with the lawyer, "so, Mr. Douglass Owen is not glad to see me this time—he does not even offer me a seat—and I so long waiting for him in the hall. I shall seat myself, nevertheless."

She evidently read his feelings aright.

Owen's manner indicated clearly that her presence was not specially desired.

"I thought, Bonnemarch, you had gone; and was under the belief that you were now well on your voyage. I am not pleased to know otherwise, much good as your presence always does me. It only prolongs my agony at parting, you know; and one hates to be always in tears."

His words were coolly flippant, but his manner, in spite of his effort to the contrary, indicated that he was putting a strong restraint upon himself, for his eyes flashed with an unusual light.

None of these indications escaped the woman.

"Mr. Owen must have breath to waste this morning, he is so facetious. You do not ask me my business with you?"

"No, Bonnemarch," he answered, shortly. "I thought all was said on that point yesterday that was necessary to say."

"But Mr. Owen had no money then?" her fingers beating a lively march on the desk by which she sat.

"Did Mr. Owen tell you that he expected any?" he answered, sharply.

The woman laughed. "No, he did not."

"Why, then, have you come back?"

She laughed again in an exasperating way, and drummed a slower and statelier measure on the desk.

"I'll tell you why, Mr. Douglass Owen."

The woman moved her chair so that the broad desk was squarely between them. "I have come back," she said, her voice lowered, and she looked at him intently, "because I wished to see Mr. Owen after he had drawn the money on the forged cheque."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SPIDER AND HIS WEB.

The man was too young in crime to meet the discovery and charge this implied without a tremor. His dark face turned to a duskier hue and then whitened out like a white ocean beach when a dark wave recedes. His lips moved as if they would aid in the formation of words, but no sound came from them, while his hands involuntarily clinched as if they would gladly have stricken her down.

The woman laughed again, but there was more danger than music in it to the ears of Douglass Owen. Her eyes, as sharp and glittering as his own, were watching his every movement.

"The big desk is between us," she said. "Perhaps Mr. Owen will sit down there?" indicating a chair.

Without a word he dropped into it, his strength for the moment gone.

"That is well. I thought my good friend would understand why Bonnemarch has returned. Bonne wants money, as she told you yesterday. She went to your lawyer and what did she get?—barely enough to pay her passage. But Bonne has changed her mind; she will not go to New Orleans; she will go home to her own country—to Paris—where people live—live! Mr. Owen must divide that money with Bonnemarch."

The cowed and stricken young man had thus far allowed her to proceed from sheer inability to interpolate a word; but the demand for money, and the knowledge that he had it and could purchase her silence, called up all his bravado.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, with assumed fierceness, "by such lunacy as this? You are carrying it with a very high hand. You can extort no money from me by threats. Why should I not give you in charge of the police for what you have done already?"

"Why?" and the woman's laughter this time was shrill, while her finger-tips on the desk beat out a funeral march. "Why?" she repeated, rising with a swift movement from the desk, and with a cat-like step reaching his wardrobe, and throwing open the door—"because of this—of this!" pulling out the sportman's hat and coat and hurling them on the floor. "This was the disguise Mr. Owen assumed to draw the money! Not to pass himself off for his friend, Ned Alpine? Oh, no! Ah-ha!" she cried, fiercely. "Bonnemarch holds Mr. Douglass Owen in the hollow of her hand! But never mind! he has got the money and will share it with his faithful servant who has kept the other secret so long."

While speaking she had gone back to her seat, and Owen as if by sudden impulse locked the door.

"Perhaps," he said, with a fierceness that his weaker nature seemed to draw from her own more daring—"perhaps the hand is not so strong to hold as you may think."

"It is strong enough to crush all your projects," she declared with the calmness that certainty gives.

Much too world-knowing, as this woman unquestionably was, she had not enough wisdom to understand or comprehend the danger of forcing a nature like his to turn upon itself.

Smitten down by being confronted with his crime in a quarter entirely unlooked-for, he could not even argue the question with himself. Discovery was the one great dread that took hold of him. How to silence her?—not by money—for even if given money to-day she would surely come again tomorrow. Yet the deadly purpose was there. To silence her once and for all!

His hand rose mechanically to his breast-pocket. There was no weapon there. Had there been, in the desperate strain that was upon him, it is possible the life of his visitor would have been but a breath that vanishes away. Fortunately, or unfortunately, his fingers touched a paper in his pocket—that given him by Ned Alpine—and on the instant it flashed a new and electrical revulsion through his mind. He drew it forth and unfolded it.

The strained and hard look on his face relaxed. The fierce and deadly pallor that his dark visage had worn lighted up.

"Look at that," he said in a voice still hoarse, but triumphant; and see what your threats are worth. See my authority if you think my acts are irregular."

He held the paper toward her.

The woman looked at it sharply and with some suspicion.

"Well," she calmly said, without any indication of her actual thoughts. "You must give me money all the same, though I will not say half—if you have to share it with some one else."

"Why should I give you any?" he demanded, with the leer that belongs to small cunning; "my web is not broken yet."

"But it may be at any moment. You forget our good friend, the lawyer. Supposing I should go to monsieur, the lawyer, and tell him the truth—what you and I know. He would certainly give me enough to take me to Paris; but I would rather have it from you."

"Well, you shall have it, Bonnemarch; but"—remembering that it was in large bills in the safe and unwilling she should see how much—"I can only give you a few dollars to-day," taking some money from his pocket. "If you can come in to-morrow I will give you enough to take you abroad; in fact," he added as a sudden thought occurred to him, "I can get you a ticket by one of the Havre steamers."

"Very well—I will expect it, then."

He arose and unlocked the door, assuming his previous flippant manner.

She gathered her draperies as if afraid that some portion of her dress might touch him, and disappeared without once looking back.

He closed the door and stepping back of the desk looked at himself in a mirror hanging on the wall.

He smiled grimly.

"Kill me," would she? By the looks of that face—"eying the reflection—"I think that her danger would be far greater than mine!"

CHAPTER XXII.

IOLA IN HER BOUDOIR.

In the comfortable morning room adjoining Iola's chamber, which was fitted up and adorned with all the appliances and conveniences that modern art

could devise, or a young lady desire in a boudoir, mother and daughter were holding an interview which Mrs. Alpine regarded as of special importance.

It was rather late for the breakfast hour, but Iola's illness which was now in a fair way to rapidly become a thing of the past, was a sufficient justification for the lateness of the hour.

From the first moment of hearing the name of Seacroft pass Iola's lips in her wandering utterances, Mrs. Alpine had decided that there was a deeper mystery connected with it than any mere phantasy in the girl's mind. No alleged coincidence such as the lawyer had spoken of could explain Iola's knowledge of the name, or set the maternal solicitude at rest regarding it.

Not only to obtain a clew thereto, but to learn all the facts bearing upon her utterance of the name, was Mrs. Alpine's ulterior purpose in sitting down with Iola to the meal—half lunch and half breakfast—in the quiet of the young girl's apartments.

By careful inquiries skillfully made, and by pertinent suggestions, she led her on step by step until the young girl with tears in her eyes suddenly rose and threw herself in Mrs. Alpine's arms.

"Dear mamma!" she cried, "for you are dearer to me now than ever—a thousand-fold dearer—why should I keep my heart from you who are so much older, so much wiser than I? I cannot do it if I would."

Mrs. Alpine drew her closer to her bosom in sympathetic encouragement and kissed her tenderly.

"My darling, if your own heart prompts you to such a course it is wise. There is no counsel so safe for a young girl as that of a mother's. I am sure that my Iola can have nothing to tell that my love could not excuse, though wisdom of the world's ways might not always approve."

"Mamma, I have seen him!"

"Him?—Edward Alpine?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!—he has not been here since—"

"No, mamma, but I have been to him—to his hotel!"—with hesitating speech and maidenly blushes.

"To his hotel?" echoed Mrs. Alpine in deep astonishment.

"Yes," asserted Iola, growing more courageous, and speaking rapidly: for with the ice, so to speak, once broken, she felt the worst was over. "I heard Mr. Bookout say that night to Mr. Owen, the young man who came here, that the road to town was smooth and safe and after you left me in my room, I took the train and went direct to Edward's hotel. What possessed me I cannot tell, mamma"—mindful of the amazement reflected in Mrs. Alpine's face and propitiating a gentle judgment by an appealing kiss and caress. "But this I remember," she continued, her voice gathering strength—"that I was determined to find out why he—Edward—had—done what he had; and I demanded to know from his own lips, why he had thus waited until the last, and then rejected me at the altar? For what had I done, except—except—love him too well?—and if his love for me was so weak—"

The young girl's voice faltered.

"My darling," cried Mrs. Alpine, sympathetically gathering her in her arms. "Spare yourself the recital. But I hope you did not spare him! What did he say to excuse or justify his treachery? What could he say?"

"Very little, mamma. He did not even seek to palliate his offense. Yet his conduct was strange—very strange. His countenance brightened and lightened when he first recognized me, as I have seen it in dreams—as if he was rejoiced to see me; and then as suddenly as if he recalled something he had forgotten, his face changed and he ordered me to begone from his presence. But I was firm and still demanded to know, until—Oh! mamma! mamma! he loves another," and the sweet voice broke in tremulous tears on the matronly bosom like the murmur of spent waves on an evergreen shore.

For some moments silence ensued.

"Did he, Edward Alpine, say that he loved another?" Mrs. Alpine at length asked.

"Oh, no, no. But—but—that name—that name which you say I uttered of Grace Seacroft; it was on a letter which he had written. It was addressed to her and lay upon his table. She is stopping at the same hotel with him."

"Did you learn anything of the contents of the letter?"

"No, oh, no."

"Then why should you think that he loves another—and that other the Grace Seacroft whose name was thus addressed? Did he allude to it?"

"No, mamma," admitted Iola, beginning to think from her mother's manner that her own conclusion had been hasty regarding the letter.

"It was then only your impression?" continued Mrs. Alpine reflectively.

"That was all," responded Iola. "But I—I—"

And in stammering words, and little by little, Mrs. Alpine ascertained the additional facts—that Iola's excitement had overcome her and that she had fainted. That the young man, Owen, who came in at the moment had driven her home in a carriage in obedience to Ned's orders. That he had left her at the gate, and that she was making her way in through the wing when she encountered the burglars as was known.

Thus getting at all the details as far as practicable, and disinclined to believe as she was, that Iola's impression regarding the Grace Seacroft being the girl with whom Ned was in love was correct—yet Mrs. Alpine was startled and alarmed regarding the possibility of some pending scheme on the part of the stranger bearing that name who had written to Mr. Alpine.

While it was evident that Ned must have had some extraordinary reason for the course he had taken, Mrs. Alpine did not think that there was a new love in the case, for if so why should he not have remained abroad instead of returning and by his dishonorable course humiliating his father whose stern integrity he so well knew? Was it not rather more reasonable to suppose that he had fallen into the hands of sharpers who were endeavoring for their own aims to use him?

A woman of great force of character like Mrs. Alpine, was not long in deciding upon a course of action, and after some fitting words of cheerfulness and hope that left Iola in a much happier frame of mind, she touched a bell for the housekeeper.

"If you will prepare yourself for a drive in the park just before sunset, I think the benefit would be substantial, my dear child," she said suggestively, and fondly embracing the girl she left her and descended to the library, where Mr. Alpine was deeply engaged with his books containing the family history.

He looked up eagerly as she entered.

"I have copied it in," he exclaimed—"the long missing link that Bookout brought."

"You believe it satisfactory, then?" she questioned with no great amount of interest.

"Certainly—I see no room for doubt. How is Iola?"

"Greatly improved, and I have suggested to her that this afternoon toward evening we will drive in the park."

"A very good proposal, and you will find it also beneficial for yourself," he said, regarding her with tender concern.

"You are always so thoughtful for me," she asserted, resting her hand upon his shoulder. "I can never repay you."

"My love, you have already, a thousand times, and do daily."

"I see you will not let me be your debtor. But a truce to this. There is something that I wished to say in reference to the meeting with this stranger this afternoon at Mr. Bookout's office."

"My dear, what is it?"

"You have no objection to my being present?"

"You?" with some surprise in his tone. "How could I have if you will do me the honor, and think the fatigue will not be too great?"

"Thank you. I shall then accompany you. What is the hour of meeting?"

"At three o'clock. We will leave here in ample time so as not to conflict with Mr. Bookout's promptness."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MEETING AT BOOKOUT'S OFFICE.

At the hour appointed, Mr. Alpine and his wife entered the door of the building wherein the offices of his legal adviser were located, passing as they did so a young man coming out, who doffed his hat with a very profound bow.

Mr. Alpine did not acknowledge the salute, but looked at his wife inquiringly.

"It is that young man who brought—the message, I think," she said.

Mr. Alpine's features grew somewhat sterner.

"I remember," he remarked, briefly. "Bookout sometimes gives him employment."

They slowly ascended the stairs and were met at the door by Mr. Bookout, who gave them a formal greeting.

Whatever surprise the lawyer may have felt at the presence of Mrs. Alpine was not apparent beneath the inscrutable veil he always wore.

"The other parties are here before you," he briefly remarked, as he conducted them toward his private office; and a moment later a formal introduction took place.

"Mr. and Mrs. Alpine—Mr. and Miss Seacroft."

"I anticipate that you will both be surprised," he added in a lower tone to Mr. Alpine. "In fact, I confess to considerable surprise myself,"—with his legal air of business strong upon him, but smiling pleasantly on his visitors; "for I must admit that in Mr. Seacroft's granddaughter for whom he was solicitous of guardianship, I had expected to see a young girl of rather tender years, and not the distinguished singer about whose voice the papers just now are so filled with compliments."

The old man, Edward Seacroft, with his smooth boyish countenance rosier than ever, which made his hair seem, if possible, still more snowy, looked exceedingly conscious at this.

"It is true I neglected to state my granddaughter's age in the note I sent you, but—"

"The simple truth is, my friend," said Miss Seacroft, "that my grandpa has not realized but that I am still a little girl requiring his care and supervision."

"And so you do—so you do," interrupted the old gentleman. "How could you get along without me, my darling?"

"I have never expected to, grandpa. I have not proposed to Mr. Alpine to take you under his guardianship," she declared, with an arch glance at Mr. Alpine, and a musical laugh in which all joined. "For, as I have explained to Mr. Bookout," she continued, addressing herself especially to Mr. Alpine and his wife, "this movement has been entirely without my knowledge until this afternoon. Indeed, I suppose it is only the necessity of the case that brought me into it at all," and she laughed joyfully.

"But, my dear, you do not understand that—that—"

"Yes, I do," declared Miss Seacroft, more gravely. "Dear grandpa, I know all about your health, though you have so lovingly striven to keep it from me—I have guessed it all."

"It seems to me, then," cried Mr. Alpine, "that the

proposal falls to the ground—inasmuch as in the person of one so reliant and so capable of managing her own affairs as Miss Seacroft has proved, by—by—"

"By years of experience," suggested Mrs. Alpine, "as her identity, as the new and popular singer, shows."

"Yes. Thank you, my dear; that is what I was hesitating to say."

"And correctly understanding the situation," asserted Miss Seacroft. "For I really do not see—however gratifying it might be to have your gracious supervision in my behalf—that it would be either fair or just to ask it. My grandpa has been so disturbed by fears of what might happen to him," looking at him with deep feeling, "that he has forgotten how old I really am. Why, I am twenty-six years of age."

"Is it possible, my dear?" exclaimed the old man, in evident astonishment, "that it has been so long since—"

"Since the girl-baby drifted out to sea in the ruins of the old summer-house?" interrupted Miss Seacroft. "Yes, grandpa, I am really twenty-six."

"Just—just—the age my daughter Mildred would have been had she lived," said Mr. Alpine, with a sigh of regret. "And—and—" he added, with unusual warmth of manner—"have you noticed how strongly she resembles—"

He started suddenly and paused in his eager utterance as he glanced at his wife, from whose handsome features a strange pallor had swept the roseate hues, and whose shocked glance had reverted from the young lady to Mr. Bookout.

"My dear," he cried, in accents of alarm, "you are ill!"

"I—I—the room! Is it not rather close? Do not mind me—I am well already," she asserted, with strong efforts at self-control. "I had hardly noticed the resemblance," she said, slowly.

The lawyer had risen swiftly, and thrown open a door for more air, and with equal celerity procured from a locker a glass of port.

She thanked him with a silent gesture, and drank a portion.

Relieved of his anxiety, Mr. Alpine returned to the subject.

"There is certainly a resemblance to the Alpines, a very strong likeness," walking up and down merrily, and looking at the young lady. "Probably Mr. Bookout noticed it."

The lawyer glanced from one to the other inscrutably.

"Since my observation is challenged, I should say there was something of a likeness. Perhaps some remote connection," he added, suggestively, "dating back one hundred and sixty years. The recent addition to the family record confirms as much. You remember the names?"

"Yes, yes, family names, of course," declared Mr. Alpine, with eagerness. "I had forgotten that. Certainly, that is it."

The glance of Mrs. Alpine rested with forceful concentration upon the lawyer's face while he was offering his solution of the problem, and her lips moved slowly at its ready acceptance by Mr. Alpine, as if she would have spoken.

There was a strange expression upon her features which might have been interpreted as doubt, expectation, or thankfulness, either, or all three, as she turned away her gaze.

"Twenty-six!" smilingly said Mr. Alpine, in a tone of special interest, as he took Miss Seacroft's hand. "I had a daughter whose age would have been the same, had she lived, and I think she would have looked like you. She died at the age of twelve, and was buried at Greenwood. But this is family history, and does not interest you, though I am glad—exceedingly glad—that we have met. I am drawn to you—drawn to you—more than I can say; and your grandfather, too," he added, shaking hands with him. "I shall be glad to know you both better, and trust you will visit us. And my dear wife, I know, will welcome you."

He turned toward Mrs. Alpine as he spoke.

There was a look of sudden anguish, inexpressible and undefined, which passed over her face like an electric wave, while tremblingly she strove to rise.

The alarmed group sprung toward her, and she fell quietly back in her husband's arms.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IOLA MISSING.

The sudden and alarming fainting-fit to which Mrs. Alpine had succumbed, did not readily yield to the various restoratives and expedients suggested by her anxious friends, and it was only when a physician was called that she could be aroused from her unconscious condition.

"Any mental trouble?" the physician had asked of Mr. Bookout, while waiting for the operation of the remedies applied, and the lawyer had shaken his head in an ambiguous manner, that might have implied anything or nothing to the interlocutor.

The lady was at length so far restored as to recognize her friends, and, after some little time for further recuperation, was assisted down-stairs to the carriage.

By this time, however, it was near dark, and with a brief and informal farewell, Mr. Alpine ordered the coachman to drive directly home, and it was nightfall when they reached the house.

The easy movement of the carriage, and the outside air proved very beneficial to Mrs. Alpine, who soon quite recovered from her sudden indisposition.

On the way homeward her interest in the late interview with the Seacrofts greatly revived, as it appeared by her reference to them, and had the effect of drawing out Mr. Alpine from his usual conservative views regarding newly-made acquaintances, and he so far departed from his stately reserve, as

to express himself very favorably impressed with both the young lady and the grandfather.

"I trust I did not in any way make myself ridiculous while unconscious?" said Mrs. Alpine. And in answer to Mr. Alpine's look of surprise she continued: "I thought perhaps I might have made some strange remark regarding myself or some one else as people do sometimes in such cases."

"Oh no, my dear," replied Mr. Alpine pressing her hand reassuringly—"your lips were closed as tightly as if—as if—"

"As if the hand of fate had silenced them, I suppose," she added with some apparent relief.

"Yes, yes. You never uttered a sound, and for a few moments I thought—I thought—" with a half embrace.

"Never mind now what you thought," she breathed quietly, leaning back more restfully against the cushions, and nestling more closely to him.

They reached home at last—Mr. Alpine saying as he dismissed the carriage: "Iola's ride in the park will have to be given up to-day; we are altogether too late."

"Of course," assented Mrs. Alpine, but we shall easily console her for the disappointment by an account of our new acquaintances. And that reminds me that we shall all be anxious to hear the new *Prima Donna* sing."

"I will arrange it to-morrow," said Mr. Alpine with renewed interest as they entered the house.

It was only natural, with the young girl fresh in his thoughts, that Mr. Alpine's first inquiry was for his adopted daughter.

"She has gone out," replied Mrs. Wigsmith of whom the inquiry was made.

"Gone out?" echoed both Mr. and Mrs. Alpine.

"With whom?"

"With that young man of Mr. Bookout's. He came for her in a carriage."

Mr. Alpine seemed at a loss to understand who was meant, but his wife's intuition grasped the housekeeper's meaning at once.

"That young man, Owen," she said in explanation. "He must have come here immediately after he saw us going into Mr. Bookout's office. Strange that she should have gone to ride with him, and have staid so late, in her delicate health."

"Came here immediately?" repeated Mr. Alpine. "I never heard of such assurance. An impudent puppy! How long has she been gone?"

The housekeeper glanced at the clock.

"Nearly three hours."

"Did she leave no word?"

"Nothing further than that she would return soon. I have been watching for her constantly for the last hour," continued the housekeeper.

"Well, that was all you could do," said Mr. Alpine. "We will have supper, Mrs. Wigsmith. Probably she will be here soon."

But Iola did not come.

The domestics, including the housekeeper, went about their several duties—pausing occasionally to listen for returning wheels—but the absent girl did not return.

The supper was past, and table cleared away; eight, and nine o'clock came, and yet no sound and no sign of the missing Iola.

"I can hardly think," said Mr. Alpine, stopping short in one of his walks across the long drawing-room and addressing his wife who was reclining on a lounge, comfortably wedged in by cushions—"I can hardly suppose that Iola would have gone to theater or opera without counseling with us—or with you, at least? Her absence is certainly without precedent."

Mrs. Alpine suddenly sat upright on the sofa, as if moved by the culmination of some previous thought.

"Do not get excited, my dear," she said, "but draw a chair near me. I have something to tell you that may aid us in forming some conclusion. It is merely a supposition and I wish you to maintain that dignified calmness which I admire so much in you," and her hand glided into his.

"What is it?" he questioned, with a brevity that in another man would have been ominous for the dignified calm of which she spoke.

And in as few words as possible she told him Iola's story.—How she had visited Ned, and of the young man's strange behavior, and how she had seen the letter with the name of Grace Seacroft, whom she imagined Ned was in love with—with some hesitation of manner in her narration of this part of the story. And how he afterward had sent her home in Owen's care.

"And your opinion is not the same?" he assumed, as Mrs. Alpine concluded.

"No, not then, nor now, since I have seen the young woman. The only love she is likely to have, besides that for her grandpa, is for her art. There is something deeper in the young man's conduct than I can account for, and, in that connection, is it not possible that he has sent this Owen, who presumably is his friend, not daring to come here himself?"

People who were strangers often said of Frazier Alpine, in passing him in the street—"There goes a gentleman;" and students of the manners of earlier ages might have added, "and a chevalier without reproach." The terms would never have applied to him more fittingly than at this moment.

He arose from his seat and touched a bell.

"No Alpine," asserted the chivalrous old gentleman, "can be allied with dishonor. No Alpine moves by stealth to do a deed that shall not blush to find it shame. And no Alpine will submit to be the sport and prey of a sharper, even though he assume to be of his own kith and kin."

A servitor answered the summons of the bell.

"William, order my horse, Black Friday, to be saddled at once and brought to the door."

"Yes, sir."

"My dear, surely you do not think it wise to go down there?" said Mrs. Alpine, as the man disappeared, yet with a gleam in her eyes that showed an approving resolution equal to his own.

"Wise, or otherwise," with a determination that was irrevocable—"I go, and go at once," and two minutes later he was mounted on a swift black mare, bidding Mrs. Alpine a temporary farewell in the covered carriageway.

She watched him as, with a vigor twenty years younger, he sped away in the level moonlight southward like an arrow from a bow.

CHAPTER XXV.

FATHER AND SON.

QUITE unmindful of all this activity which had such vital interest for himself, Ned Alpine, in his hotel apartments, was busily engaged in packing up for his transfer aboard the steamer on the morrow, and had just finished strapping his last portmanteau when there came a thunderous knock at the door.

The extraordinary force of it precluded the supposition that first came to him that it was Owen, or any of the people of the hotel, and instead of responding verbally to the summons, as he might otherwise have done, he sprung and opened the door, but fell back in astonishment before the one he saw there.

"Father!" he gasped as he sunk into a chair.

For the excited manner of Mr. Alpine at this late hour, so widely contrasted with his usual characteristic calm, that the son could scarcely believe that, indeed, he saw him.

The evident preparation for departure did not tend to soothe the visitor.

"Where is she?" he demanded, in threatening accents, without making the slightest response to his son's exclamation.

"She?" questioned Ned, in a bewildered manner, as if doubting if he heard aright. "Who do you mean?"

"You know very well for whom I am seeking—Iola. What have you done with her?"

"Iola," cried the younger man, springing to his feet with an excitement scarce less apparent than that of his visitor. "I had heard from Mr. Bookout, through Owen, this morning, that she was well. Has anything happened to her?"

"There has."

"What—what? for, villain though I may seem to her, I would give my life to save her from harm."

The old gentleman looked at him steadily for a moment.

"I did not know until now that you were such a consummate actor, hypocrite and scoundrel as to add outrage to injury toward the innocent young girl you profess to love."

"Stop, sir—stop! Take back those words. No saint enshrined in cathedral niche has higher place amid the holy shrines of earth than has she, Iola, in my heart of hearts. Take back the wrongful words! Sir, I am an Alpine, like yourself—though under ban to-day, incapable of injuring that noble soul. Take back the words!"

It was a strange picture, the father and son sternly confronting each other, each fierce and determined, but declaring strongly for the right, while an invisible gulf of misunderstanding rolled between.

Something in the noble bearing of the younger man seemed to impress the father even more than his words.

There was a quieter cadence in his tone as he declared:

"Never until now has the name of Alpine been coupled with dishonor and disgrace; nor did I think to live to meet such humiliation as my only son has thrust upon me, without warrant—without excuse."

"Father," cried Ned earnestly, "father!—for I will call you such—whatever has happened to Iola, it is my right to know. I demand—I implore it."

"And you profess not to know that your friend Owen has kidnapped her from the house? You, whose ready tool he was so recently?"

"Owen?—he was to have been here this evening. So help me heaven, I am guiltless of this."

"And this luggage—this packing up for departure?"

"Was because I sail in the next steamer. Nothing else. And, oh, believe me or not, as you will, how gladly would I take Iola with me as my wife."

"What then is the meaning of this? What the complication that led you to insult me—outrage her?"

"Sir, you shall know. I am married already! Nine years ago I met an attache of a ballet-troupe and married her—three weeks thereafter she fled with another man, and a short time later I heard and believed she was dead. I did not know otherwise until the day of my arrival here one hour before the time fixed for my marriage to Iola. Then I was told that she still lived."

"Is this true?"

"True as that you and I live."

"Then why was I kept in ignorance all these years?"

"Because I believed the woman dead, and looked upon it as a boyish offense, by which I had terribly suffered—something to be forgotten, and not to be inflicted on you. But while we talk we forget Iola. You say she is missing?"

"Since four o'clock this afternoon. She went away with Owen in a carriage, saying she would soon return."

"Then I must go in search of her. He must be hunted down at once," he cried, with emphasis, seizing his coat and hat. "Sir, she shall be found."

"Do you know his address?"

"Only his office—but I will find him. Do you return home and telegraph me here if she has arrived. If not, meet me in the morning, and meanwhile I

will have scoured every nook and corner in the city for a clew."

The old gentleman hesitated for a moment; but there was no mistaking his son's energy and decision.

Every nerve of the young man's being seemed fully aroused.

"I shall trust you in this matter," said the father, simply—about to depart—"and will adopt the course that you suggest. Regarding what you have told me I will not now say what its influence hereafter may or may not be, nor will I express any useless regrets, but I will add this: That thus far there does not appear to be willful crime in your conduct, and—thank God!—there are no mistakes in life that cannot be atoned for! Good-night."

The door opened and closed. The grand old man was gone.

And Ned, who had listened with bowed head and feelings of regret and penitence to which no pen could do justice, speedily followed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IOLA'S PERIL.

LET US place our invisible fingers upon the horologue and turn back the indicator that sweeps the circle of the passing hours.

When Mr. and Mrs. Alpine, going into the lawyer's office, met Douglass Owen coming out, it proved a turning point to the unadjusted scale of future purposes, but feebly balanced, in the young man's mind.

Mr. Alpine's non-recognition of him was bitterly resented as he walked away.

"An old Bourbon," he muttered, "who is unable to see or understand anything beyond his own horizon. I need expect no encouragement from him in visiting his house. But what are they going to do there? No matter; is this, or is it not, my opportunity?"

He walked up the street with rapid strides evolving the thought that had suddenly come uppermost, and finally smote his hands, with an emphatic gesture, as he declared:

"I will do it! Bookout's treatment of me this morning was cool and shabby enough, and this afternoon it is unbearable. Perhaps he has suspicions of me. How do I know but what Bonnemarch has already betrayed me to him? But whether so or not, it is plainly apparent that he intends to go back on all his promises at last—which, by the way, have always been ambiguous and uncertain. I have nearly four thousand dollars in ready funds. Business is perfectly dead, and it would take every dollar to pay my debts. To-morrow Bonnemarch will come for her hush-money, and—and she is not to be trusted, even then. Why not strike now, while the iron is hot? Success hinges on immediate action. Shall I act? I will!"

"But not a step without the girl! With her once out of the house, with the start I can now obtain, she cannot easily be found, and when found it will be as Mrs. Douglass Owen. Success will condone everything, and she and they will easily forgive the man whose love and audacity has taken desperate means to win her. How lucky that Ned mentioned the old House on the Marsh, yesterday! Nobody there; it is just the thing! The isolation is complete, and yet it is easy of access by boat or rail. One night there will bring her to terms—with such arguments as I shall use in my own favor, and with Ned's secret to aid me, to say nothing of my love, against which no woman can long hold out."

His dark passion-haunted face lighted up with a glow of intense eagerness at the picture his fancy conjured up.

"Her consent once gained," he resumed, "a little trip to a Jersey clergyman will finish the business in short order, and we can return at once to the city, notify 'papa and mamma,' and wait for forgiveness until the storm blows over. This is the plan. Easy enough—my fate declares it! And it shall be done!"

He sprung into a passing car and went direct to one of the North river piers, a few blocks further up, where he entered one of the numerous barge offices to be found in that locality, where tugs and boats of all kinds were on hire. He came out again in a few moments accompanied by a clerk, and going to the end of the pier took a glance at a small steam-tug lying there.

"She was originally built for a private yacht," said the clerk, "draws but little water, and can run like a deer," in elucidation of her good qualities.

"All the better, as it will save valuable time. She will do. It will not take her long to run up to the landing I mentioned?"

"No—only a few minutes."

"Very good; I will go up in her, as I see steam is up. Where is the captain?"

"Inside."

"Good, again. Let us start at once."

A quarter of an hour later the little steam-tug ran alongside a landing well up-town on the east side of the river, and Owen sprang ashore.

A carriage was close at hand waiting for a fare. He called to the driver, said a word or two, and got in.

And a few minutes afterward he was having a brief, and on her part, an exciting interview with Iola at the Alpine mansion.

Under ordinary circumstances Douglass Owen would have found his purpose very difficult of accomplishment. But he now came, as he told Iola, direct from Ned Alpine who, he stated was eagerly waiting to see her, that he might make an ample apology and full explanation of all in his conduct that now seemed so reprehensible and strange.

"I need not enlarge on his love for you," continued the crafty villain, in furtherance of his purpose, as he watched the shifting lights and shadows of the varying emotions reflected in the young girl's face—"but I will say to you that all the grievous trouble

that has come between you will be speedily removed if you come to him at once. With his father's anger upon him he cannot venture here, and there is no time to be lost, as he has already secured his passage to leave by the next steamer."

"To leave the country?"

"Yes—forever, unless you come to him."

"Enough—I will go," and the young girl arose in brave self-reliance.

No doubt or question came to her mind. The mere supposition that Ned was waiting to explain the dark cloud that had fallen between them, and that his love for her had never faltered, seemed to her but a natural result in the light of her own undying affection.

In response to Owen's suggestion of the need of haste, she replied that five minutes would be ample time to get ready; and in truth not four had elapsed before Owen was driving triumphantly away, explaining as he went that Ned was down the bay, and that he had sent a boat in his service for her.

The few minutes occupied in driving to the boat passed like a dream, and before she could hardly realize it the landing was reached, the carriage dismissed, and she was hurried on board.

She sat in the little cabin of the tug alone, while Owen, in discussion with the captain outside, was watching the foam as it flew from the bows in their rapid progress down the river and harbor.

At his suggestion, however, as the little steamer began to run close in, she came outside and watched the lessening objects cityward, until at length he called her attention to a low, incongruous pile of buildings standing solitary and alone, which seemed, as seen from the ocean, to occupy an out-jutting point, as an arm of the sea flowed to the left of it.

"That is our destination," declared Owen to her, pointing it out, and pretending to scan closely the old observatory at the top, he added: "He might be up there now watching for us, but will not show himself till assured of your forgiveness—and in asking it he desires to meet you alone."

The glow on the young girl's face at this insidious suggestion, showed how eager and anxious she was to grant it.

It only added fuel to the flame of Owen's jealousy and strengthened his resolve.

In a minute or two more they rounded the point and skillfully ran alongside of the old sea wall; and, at a place where it was broken down, she sprung lightly ashore, while Owen, slowly following, had some concluding words with the captain.

"We shall return by rail," he said, after complimenting the captain on the speed of his little craft; and bidding him good-day he lingered to watch him, as he steamed out again into the bay and homeward.

By this time the girl was half-way up the slope, but half-ashamed of her apparent eagerness, returned a few steps to meet the wily schemer who detained her by pointing out surrounding objects—including the rude depot half a mile distant—until the little steamer was well beyond signal, and a mere speck in the distance.

They ascended the slope together.

"If you will seat yourself on the porch," he said, for the first time showing hesitation, which however, she ascribed to quite a different cause, "I will go in and prepare him."

"Is it necessary?" she asked.

His hand was on the outer door but as he expected he found it locked, and with an admonition to "wait," he went around and effected an entrance at the back.

"There is nothing to prevent your going up to him now if you wish," he declared, as he threw open the door and bade her enter.

"I will go, then," she said, without a moment's hesitation.

A broad, wide hall was before her and he guided her through this to the old oaken staircase.

"Go up softly one flight and turn to the right," he instructed, while his dark eyes gleamed with a look that would have been a warning had she seen it.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE TOILS.

SHE glided up and opened the door into the old Dutch Governor's room of state.

There was no one there, but she saw a door open at the further end, and she passed swiftly, expectantly toward it.

It was an ancient chamber with quaint furnishings, which passed unnoticed, for the one face in all the world for which she was looking was not there.

There was another room at the other end and toward this she turned, but at that moment the outer door by which she had entered suddenly closed, and a key turned in the lock outside, while retreating footsteps sounded on the stairs.

Up to that one startling moment as we have seen not a thought or question of her lover's being there had entered her mind, nor even yet, until she had glanced into the second chamber, looked again through all three of the rooms, and finally realized that the strong door by which she had entered was locked against her egress.

In the first whirl of her startled senses she was quite unable to think clearly, or act promptly, had her liberty or life depended upon it, but gradually her mind began to grow calmer.

She did not sink or swoon, but like the good, true girl she was as she realized her helplessness, fell upon her knees in earnest prayer to the great All-Father to protect and guide her. Rising refreshed and strengthened she began to examine the windows and their fastenings.

The bitter disappointment of not seeing her lover, added to the revelation of Owen's treachery, which

every minute grew more and more apparent, soon brought its own reaction.

Her hasty purpose—or rather, thought of attempting to escape by the windows, iron-barred as they were—was relinquished before it was fairly conceived, and she nervously herself to await Owen's return with such fortitude as she could command—for, whatever his purpose, she had no doubt but that he would soon reappear.

She sat down in one of the carved window-seats and watched the sun slowly sinking to the west, with such feelings as she had never before known.

Had she been told that not two days had elapsed since Ned Alpine had looked from that very same window, what new interest it would have lent to sky and landscape!

How long she sat there she could not tell, but the sunset glow on sward, and marsh, and sea had begun to deepen toward twilight when there was a sound of a moving bolt, an opening door, and Douglass Owen stood before her.

He brought with him a small hamper, evidently well filled, which he set down on entering; and, rapidly approaching her, dropped on his knees.

"Dear Miss Mari," he cried, with all the earnestness and pathos at his command, "unless your maidenly pity is akin to my great love, I know it will take years for you to forgive me! But I love you! love you—with an absorbing passion—"

"Love?"

It was a scornful echo that rang through the room. The young girl rose from her seat imperiously, disdainfully.

"What, sir," she exclaimed, "can you know of love, to descend to such artifice—such villainy as this? What have I done," she cried, appealingly, "to inspire a love so base? Does love injure its object? Does love stoop to perfidy and outrage? Does love entrap by misleading the heart's best affection? No."

"Yet for years I have loved you with a love that has thrilled every nerve of my being. Almost strangers as we have been, I have adored you. I have worshipped you from afar as the Eastern devotee worships the sun, without knowing—without thinking—that you could at last be mine! But now I am free to hope, to urge—nay, if it must be, to insist upon its acceptance! I love you as man never yet loved woman, and would marry you at once. I beg, I implore, I demand your love. Promise me—Hush! a moment, and hear this!" he ejaculated, as she was about to speak. "So long as Ned Alpine was your accepted suitor, and while your hopes were centered in him, I could not and did not speak; but knowing you are parted forever, why should I not?"

"Parted forever?" she faltered.

"Yes—forever! For, whatever I have told you to secure your coming here, Ned Alpine is already married.

"Married!"

The young girl felt her strength suddenly leaving her, and she sat down again in the broad window-seat.

"Yes, he is married! Married years ago, as Mr. Bookout knows, for he has seen his wife. His father has disinherited him, as you must have heard him declare, and he sails for Europe to-morrow."

"How can I believe you who have already so grossly deceived me?"

"You may easily believe this if you will recall what he last said to you. And do not forget that it was my love for you that compelled my course."

"Such love!" she commented, disdainfully—"hatred would be better."

"I might appeal to Mr. Bookout for the truth of this, but I will do better! I will show you, that while Ned may not have forgotten you, he at least knows his duty, and it is by his suggestion, and by his authority, that I—his friend—have done what I have."

"Monstrous! I cannot believe it!"

"Look, then, at this paper," he suggested, rising and flourishing it before the eyes of the agitated girl. "What does he say in this, dated only yesterday?"

Striving with all her power of mind to preserve her calmness, the girl took the paper, satisfied herself of its genuineness, and read it:

"It is at my request and at my desire that Douglass Owen has done what he has. I assume the entire consequences of his acts."

EDW. ALPINE."

This terrible perversion of its original purpose was too much for the young girl. The utter heartlessness it seemed to exhibit overwhelmed her.

She sank back faint and exhausted.

"Leave me—leave me!" she cried, in an agonized voice.

Miscreant though he was, Douglass Owen had the grace to do so.

Evidently deeming that the paper he had shown her was a confirmation of the baseness of his rival that would induce her to look more favorably upon himself, he muttered in a half audible voice that he would soon return for her answer, and let himself out, locking the door behind him.

The day softened into twilight and the twilight deepened into darkness, the great moon began to rise over the sea, and the stars came out one by one, but yet the girl did not move nor did Owen return.

At last her heart-breaking sobs ceased, her agitated breathing became more regular, and with long-drawn sighs, she fell asleep. In spite of all her recent agitation and of her strange surroundings—sleep, beneficent and blessed sleep, came to soothe and refresh her at last.

The soft silvery light stole in at the window revealing in mellifluous splendor the shapely contour of the young girl's form and face as she lay, her head upon her arm, on the window-seat.

Suddenly there was a slight but noiseless movement at the side of the room opposite that where the young girl was lying, and one of the panels—that on which the old Dutch Governor was painted—suddenly slid to one side, and a wild, haggard face appeared at the opening.

Twice before the reader has seen that strange apparition—once at Mr. Bookout's office—and again pressed against the window-pane on that stormy night when Mr. Bookout and Mrs. Alpine met in the disused wing of the Alpine mansion.

But it was now even more haggard and ghastly than then; yet, withal, there was a strange fire in the eyes—a singular expression of loss or of suffering or perchance of something loved and found when least expected.

For some minutes the face was visible thus, and then with a sigh of deep melancholy, like that of a last parting, the face disappeared and the panel softly closed.

A few minutes later there were intermittent sounds of fastening up, on the lower floor—bolts were shoved, keys turned, and windows barred, and doors made fast—and shortly afterward a wild, ragged and strange figure was skurrying along the old shell road with swinging arms and strident steps. Steps that sometimes faltered from weakness, yet hurrying toward the city, as if Danger and Death—and not moonlight and slumber—were brooding over all left behind.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WILKES AGAIN.

IT was an hour past midnight and Mr. Bookout was sleeping the sleep of an honest man, if its dreamless soundness could be deemed such an attribute, when there came a rousing peal at his bell that startled him at once into wakening activity.

It was an unusual and indeed, an extraordinary occurrence for him to be summoned from his slumbers at night, and he would have been surprised thereat on any other occasion, but he was not specially so on this.

For he had been visited by Ned Alpine two hours before, with the information of Iola's disappearance with Owen, and that interview had left him in a condition which may be described as bordering on expectancy.

He accordingly hurried on his dressing-gown and slippers, descended the stairs, and answered the bell.

On opening the door he saw a policeman, whom he slightly knew, who held by the arm, more in support than in detention, it would seem, a weak and ragged object that was gasping for breath, that he instantly recognized.

"I beg your pardon," said the officer, touching his cap, "for disturbing you at this late hour; but this creature here would have it. He was coming in suspiciously on my beat with no good account of himself, and the captain was a mind to lock him up, but he mentioned your name and plead so hard to be let come to see you, saying that he had something important to communicate, that the captain, as a favor to you, sir, thought I might venture to bring him."

Mr. Bookout, with his glance full upon the man, while the policeman was speaking, saw something in his expression that led him to say. "You have done well, Mr. Yates—Yates, I think your name is?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will take charge of him for the night," continued Mr. Bookout—"I suppose there is nothing against him?"

"Oh no, sir, nothing but his manner and looks."

"Well, no doubt he ought to be punished for those," said Mr. Bookout grimly. "But, nevertheless, I will relieve you of him, and here is something for your trouble," shaking hands with the policeman and leaving something in his palm. "Good-night."

"Thank you, sir, and good-night."

The officer disappeared, and the man Wilkes, for it was he, pressed forward into the hall.

"Oh, Mr. Bookout," he exclaimed. "The—the girl!"

"I thought so," said Mr. Bookout, sententiously.

"Come up."

He hurried his visitor up-stairs, and with him seated in a chair and the door locked, heard what he had to tell.

It was the story of Iola as he had left her, asleep in the old Dutch Governor's room in The House on the Marsh, and included also an account of the interview which he had overheard between her and Douglass Owen.

"The infernal miscreant!" exclaimed Mr. Bookout rising in wrath. "I had begun to be suspicious of him but could never have believed him capable of such a knavish piece of work as this. You say, after Owen left the house, you secured every window, locked every door and brought the outside key with you?" he asked.

"Every one" was the response. "It would be impossible to break in there now, long as it has been left disused and unfastened. The shutters and door are of oak. She is safe till I get back—quite safe!"

"Until you get back?" repeated the lawyer. "I see! But don't go yet. Wilkes, for once your failure to keep your promise has been of great benefit and I forgive you for all. Hereafter your condition must be improved."

"Very good, sir, but I shall need nothing much longer, I am all going to pieces."

"But what's the matter with you, man? You are shaking all over. Is it the chills? Here, let me give you something warming."

He produced a bottle and turning out half a glass of brandy he ordered him to take it forthwith.

The poor creature would have refused, but he

forced it down him, and pushed toward him something to eat, which he took from a closet.

"Store that away," he said, "and it will bolster you up. You are breaking down for want of nourishment; and no wonder," and he began to rapidly dress himself as he spoke.

"Here, curl up on that," as he handed him a heavy blanket shawl. "I am going out. Remain here till I return, and I will see what can be done."

He finished dressing, threw on a light overcoat; and went out, closing the door behind him, descending the stairs and letting himself into the street.

He went directly to Ned Alpine's hotel and to his rooms. He found the young man absent, and sat down and wrote a note telling him that Iola was found, and to come to him at once. This he left where it would meet his eyes on entering.

He then returned to his office where he found the man, Wilkes, so quiet and still that at first he thought him asleep, but immediately discovered the contrary, for he roused up.

"I could not sleep," he said, as if he divined what was passing in the lawyer's mind. "But I am feeling stronger, thanks to the warmth and brandy, and fully able to do what I have to do."

He struggled to his feet and after one or two weak attempts succeeded in standing upright.

"You are strong enough to go back?" asked the lawyer doubtfully, consulting his watch.

The man nodded.

"It is already three o'clock," continued Mr. Bookout, "and I might go with you, but must wait for young Mr. Alpine, for whom I have left word, and who may come in at any moment. If your feelings for the child induce your going, I shall not attempt to dissuade you. Keep the shawl," he added, as the man was about to throw it off. "You will need it; and here, take some money. You will have no trouble from the police, possibly; but I had better give you a card to the effect that you are in my service, which you can show on emergency. How will you get there?"

"I can hire a boat to take me down the Kill von Kull to a point I know of, from which the distance on foot will be easy."

"Very well. I shall probably be down by the first train," and with a few additional remarks of insufficient importance to be noted herein, he saw him depart.

Mr. Bookout returned to his inner office, stirred up the soft-coal fire in the grate, for the outside air was raw, and sat down to wait for the arrival of Ned.

But at half-past three in the morning men of sixty, whose slumbers have been disturbed, feel the physical demand for sleep somewhat stronger than the desire to keep awake, unless the necessity is pressing.

It was not strange, then, that in his easy-chair before the comfortable fire the lawyer in the meditative stillness that succeeded, should have fallen into a doze; or that at last his dozing should have culminated in sound sleep.

It was broad daylight when, with a sudden start, Mr. Bookout awoke and found the fire dead on the hearth and the sun streaming in through the chinks of the closed shutters.

There was an ancient clock of the last century ticking away in the corner, and a glance at its face showed the startled lawyer that it was seven.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed as the remembrance of the last night's business flashed through his mind. "Can Ned have been here?—but, no, or he would have certainly run me up."

He proceeded to open the shutters and arrange his toilet, which he had hardly finished when there was a knock at the door, and a servitor from a neighboring restaurant, who served him with his meals, brought in his breakfast, which he uncovered in the inner room.

Although his mind was far from being at ease he was so much the slave of habit as to eat his breakfast—at the regular hour—though with possibly less enjoyment than usual.

Determined to see Ned immediately, after dismissing the servant, he was in the act of locking the door on his way out, when the sound of feet on the staircase and voices induced him to pause.

A moment more and Ned Alpine came rushing up three steps at a time in great excitement.

"Thank heaven," he cried, "that I was not too late to find you! Let us in—let us in."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MORE SECRETS THAN ONE.

WITHOUT waiting for the lawyer to lead the way, Ned Alpine pushed past him, almost dragging him back into the room.

He was followed by a woman closely veiled, whose form and figure the old lawyer at once recognized.

"Ah," questioned Mr. Bookout, "what is madame doing here?"

"He brought me," responded the woman dryly, with her French accent strong upon her.

She pointed to Ned.

"He!" cried Bookout, "he—your husband?"

The woman laughed, shrilly.

"Yes, and no," she said. "He brought me, but he is not my husband. I never had any husband—nor do I want one."

"What riddle is this?" exclaimed the old man sternly, as he looked from one to the other. "Explain."

"It means," said the woman, before Ned could speak—"it means that monsieur, the lawyer, has been imposed upon; that I was never that man's wife, though I was his wife's sister."

"And she," exclaimed the lawyer—"where is she?"

"Dead," cried Ned, "more than eight years ago, as I supposed. The rumor was true, and this woman, her sister, accidentally discovered by Owen,

was sent to you by him to repeat the little story which he put in her mouth."

"I see," said the lawyer, "an impostor! False pretenses, madame!—And he, a cowardly hound—but deeper than I thought. You got my letter, Ned, at the hotel?"

"Yes, yes. But not until this moment. She was safe, you said—all safe! This business"—referring to the woman—"detained me. I was watching for Owen at his office, and was startled by this woman's appearance—so like in figure and walk; but the moment I saw her face the imposition was at an end. She was prompt to acknowledge her share in the scheme and make amends by coming to see you."

"Monsieur Alpine must not forget his promise."

"And what was that?" questioned the lawyer.

"Immunity from punishment," replied Ned.

"Very good; but we may as well have her acknowledgment in black and white," and he dashed off a few lines. "Sign that, madame, and go your way. It confesses your duplicity, and states of your own knowledge the death of the woman, eight years ago, who was married to Edward Alpine."

She signed it as directed, and the lawyer duly attested the signature.

"Madame is at liberty to go," said Alpine, opening the door for her, and, without a backward glance or any other acknowledgment, they were left alone.

"And now," cried Ned, as he clasped the lawyer's hand, "I have inclosed your letter in a line I sent to father, stating these facts, which will place him at his ease, and let us to the rescue at once!"

"Hold!" cried a cheerful voice at the door. "The rescue of whom?" and turning with a start at the sudden intrusion, they saw one whom they least expected—Mr. Seacroft.

He was cordially welcomed, and in a few brief words informed of the situation.

His eyes sparkled with interest, and with all his boyish manner strong upon him, he said:

"At the old House on the Marsh, eh? It seems to me as if I ought to make one of your rescuing party. Can I go?"

"Why not?" demanded both in a breath—"if you are ready."

"I am."

They all came out of the office together.

They crossed the ferry and were just in time to catch a train.

The run by rail was swift and brief.

They had very nearly reached their destination when they were brought to a stand-still by encountering an empty gravel-train with a caboose attached, which, through the agency of a misplaced switch, had collided near a junction with a loaded car, and had been partly thrown from the track.

Ned sprung out to learn the cause of the detention and went forward. In a minute he was back again at Mr. Bookout's side with an ominous pallor on his face.

"Come out here, Mr. Bookout, please," he said, hoarsely. "But, no—it will shock you."

"Nothing can shock me that I ought to know," said Mr. Bookout, sternly, with a dim foreboding of what was coming, as he got out of the car and joined him.

A little group of men forward, mostly railway employees, fell away at his approach, and he looked down at a dark object in their midst.

It was the dead body of Douglass Owen—mangled and crushed, with its pallid death-white face turned upward, and its open eyes from which all life had vanished, staring starkly toward the morning sun.

Mr. Bookout hunted up the conductor, who explained that the young man had boarded the train at the station below and insisted on riding, saying he could not wait for the regular train. While he was speaking the district coroner made his appearance and to him the lawyer gave some instructions as to the burial of the body, and the disposal of his effects—together with his own address.

While he had been speaking with the officials Ned had succeeded in getting a carriage, into which they now got, and in a short time were whirling across the worn shell road toward the old House on the Marsh.

Whatever fears they had entertained for the safety of Iola—if any—were at an end before they had fairly reached the old place, for one of the iron-barred windows was open, and a figure which they instantly recognized as that of the young girl, was seen waving a scarf.

"Dear soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bookout, with more emotion than Ned believed him capable of. "She recognizes us, even at this distance. I think I had better go first, Ned, to lay down the law regarding your new status."

"Do so—do so," responded the young man, agitatedly. "But, be brief—oh, be brief!"

They found the front door open, at which Mr. Bookout expressed no surprise, although he glanced about him as if half expecting to see some one.

"One minute will suffice," responded the old lawyer, as he rapidly ascended the oaken staircase.

The key had been left in the door, and in a moment more he was in the room receiving a welcome so warm from Iola that the most ardent lover might have been excused for feeling envious.

His explanation was as brief and satisfactory as Ned could have desired, and Mr. Bookout, withdrawing step by step toward the door, suddenly gave place to Ned and disappeared, leaving them alone together.

How shall I describe that meeting between two sundered hearts? Or why should I seek to do so? The reader who has followed them through their trials, and seen *Young Love's Peril*, and the joys and sorrows that have strengthened and purified their

affection, need not be told of the intense happiness—the glad outpouring—of their joyful emotion. All was explained, and forgiven.

"And their spirits rushed together

At the touching of the lips."

A sudden exclamation and a heavy fall, followed by hasty words from below, brought the lovers at last to a remembrance that there were others who had passing claims upon their attention.

They instantly hurried down.

The scene they saw was one for a painter's canvas.

Crouched in the dark angle of the hallway, shaded by the carved oak stair-case and partly concealed by the tall form of the lawyer, they saw a dusky, broken figure which neither had ever seen before; while confronting the lawyer stood a medium-sized old man with bald head and florid face—also a stranger to Iola—but whom the astonished Ned, after staring at him sharply, finally recognized as Mr. Seacroft.

On the floor lay a luxuriant white wig which the old man had taken off in removing his hat—accidentally it would seem.

"It is he," explained the man crouching behind Mr. Bookout, "not dead, thank heaven! Not dead, Mr. Bookout!" he repeated. "Oh, Great Father, I thank thee that this crime is removed from my soul!"

The lawyer had been gazing from one to the other with all the astonishment expressed on his face that his inscrutable features would permit, and a light seemed to suddenly burst upon him.

"I see!" he exclaimed, addressing Mr. Seacroft. "The masquerade is over, my friend. I understand now why this ancient place has been neglected all these years! You are—"

"Andrew Marl!" interrupted the boyish old gentleman. "I am, I confess it, he who was supposed to have been murdered eighteen years ago!"—picking up his wig and replacing it with his hat on his head. "No, I am not dead, as that nephew and others thought, but worth any number of my old smuggling ancestors yet. But—but"—turning around inquiringly, "where has he gone—that wretched Wilkes?" For the crouching figure behind Mr. Bookout had disappeared. "Let us go out into the porch, my friends," continued the cheery old gentleman, after he had shaken hands all around and congratulated Iola on her release. "Come out, and let me explain, within the circle of a wedding-ring, why I did not die in those years so long ago, but went abroad and left events to take their course."

"Good," said Mr. Bookout, referring to his watch. "And the brevity you suggest will just suit us, for we must hurry to catch the up-train."

And thus speaking they moved outside.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT LAST.

It was three days later. The hour and the scene the same as that which opened the story.

There was a small party assembled in the drawing-room of the Alpine mansion, all of whom are personally known to the reader, and there was a quiet air of expectancy visible on all.

In truth it was Iola's wedding-day.

It had come then at last! After all the doubts and fears, and trials and perils that had supervened since the greater gathering for this happy union a few short days before, and the two young hearts which had then been so agonized were to be indissolubly joined at last.

As beffited the circumstances this occasion was far quieter and less imposing than the former, but it bore within its magic circle the certainty of lasting happiness—not alone to the principals, but to all—for the truth of a steadfast undying love had been conclusively proven.

Seated at the piano, Miss Seacroft, who graced the occasion, discoursed such liquid melody and music as the old mansion had never before heard, and was surrounded by the little group whose praises and admiration were only second to that they bestowed on the bride-elect; and even Mrs. Chaperone, who was present, was heard to declare that, "If me dear C. was living" he would surely approve it.

The arrival of the clergyman and his introduction in his clerical robed was the signal for the little group to draw closer, and standing in the center of the cheerfully-lighted apartments and admirably harmonizing with the lights and shadows of the elegant surroundings, the young couple stood up to be married.

It was the beautiful Episcopal service in its impressive formula that gave the legal and clerical sanction to that higher ceremonial which Divine Law had implanted in both their hearts, and the currents of their two young lives were quickly joined in one sweetly flowing river that should flow on, flow on, forever.

Mr. Bookout grew very grave as the evening wore away and there was an expression of deep concern in his eyes as he glanced in the direction of Mrs. Alpine. He had striven, as occasion served, to draw her from behind the deep mask of melancholy and reserve that had for the last three or four days—or since her alarming attack of syncope at his office—been growing upon her.

But in vain.

A veil of impenetrable sadness appeared to have slowly descended upon her spirits. Though maintaining in a degree her customary admirable equanimity, he had seen with alarm what Mr. Alpine had not—that there was a failure of the usual elasticity of nerve and felicity of expression.

Not even the culminating happiness of Iola had been able to bring more than a fleeting smile to her face.

While Mr. Bookout, with more anxiety than he had ever known, was striving to solve a problem

that had been uppermost in his thoughts for the last three days, Mrs. Alpine suddenly rose and asking to be excused, withdrew to her own apartments.

The lawyer glanced about for Mr. Alpine who was busily engaged with Mr. Seacroft in eager conversation, and, with an apology for the interruption, drew Mr. Alpine aside for a moment, and suggested that Mrs. Alpine should consult a physician.

"These troubles," he continued, in explanation, "that we have been through, as I may say, together—"

"Yes, Bookout, together," assented Mr. Alpine, grasping his hand.

"These trials and annoyances," continued the lawyer, as if the other had not spoken, "usually tell upon the strongest of men—as for instance, upon myself. What then must be the result on a delicate woman who cannot even have the satisfaction that we have in wrestling with difficulties?"

"And you think therefore a physician should be called?" questioned Mr. Alpine.

"Not so soon as to create alarm; but if he should, at your suggestion, drop in in a friendly way and take occasion incidentally to offer professional advice you could strengthen it by your own."

"I understand," said Mr. Alpine, "and will act on the suggestion at the first opportunity. I have observed a restlessness since that attack, and had indeed mentioned the need of her taking advice. I must urge it. But, come into the library; I have been talking with Seacroft, and a marvelous story he has been telling me."

"An explanation I suppose of our accidental discovery the other day," said the lawyer, turning to Mr. Seacroft, who now joined them as they walked toward the library.

"Yes," responded that gentleman. "Yet the facts are simple enough," he continued, as they seated themselves, and were presently joined by Miss Seacroft.

"You have heard the story of how I was stricken down at a time when I was philosophically trying to carry out some reformatory ideas? (to which, by the way I may say in parenthesis, I still hold fast.) My injuries were serious, and under most circumstances would have been fatal; but I had a faithful follower in the father of the boy yonder, who secretly aided my departure from the country, and I reached England, where the little girl I had adopted, was then at school. There I learned that I had fallen heir to certain old estates originally belonging to one Seacroft. This property was left to me on condition that I would thenceforth assume the name of Edward Seacroft. I took the necessary steps, and the name became legally mine, and," continued the boyish old gentleman, his face gleaming like a rising sun as he lifted his luxuriant white wig and exposed his bald head—"I represent lawfully either name."

While he was speaking Mr. Alpine had risen and produced his family record in which he had copied the paper furnished by the lawyer, which he had obtained through the man Wilkes from the House on the Marsh.

"This, then, explains the mystery of your name; but how about Grace?"—and he looked at the young lady.

A tender light came into the old gentleman's eyes as his glance also reverted to her.

"My darling!" he cried. "It is to her I owe my present existence, for she has taught me there was something in life worth living for; and though, my friends, she is not my kin, I love her as if she represented the affections of whole generations of them," and he clasped her hand in his. "I have told the story of the girl-baby I found drifting out to sea. It seems unnecessary to say, then, that this is she, or that I should have named her Grace Seacroft in remembrance of that other Grace who, the record says, married Sir James Alpine."

"A real romance," exclaimed Mr. Alpine. "And one possessing more interest to me, I am free to admit, than any I have ever heard or read."

"If I had been less busy in my professional life," said Miss Seacroft, "or had I been less happy with my dear grandfather, as I shall ever call him, who has also been father and brother to me in his love and tenderness, I should have been troubled to know who were my ancestors. And I confess there have been times when"—and here a dewy softness stole into her eyes—"I have had a longing to know who was my mother; and whether the agony of my loss in that strange, wild way had ever any corresponding compensation to her bereaved heart. But, as it is, I have not been unhappy!" and she set the seal to her words on the old man's brow with a fervent kiss.

Mr. Bookout hearing these words—not without a faint expression of remote concern upon his inscrutable features, caressing his chin with one hand, after his manner—looked for a moment as if he could have drawn from his vast store-house of secrecy some hidden knowledge that might have solved the mystery of which the girl had spoken, and for a moment, indeed, he seemed about to speak. But the expression and the impulse passed away, and for the time he was silent.

The approach of the joyful Ned with the happy bride at this juncture widened the circle.

"Dear father," she exclaimed, grasping one of Mr. Alpine's hands, and another of Mr. Bookout's, "perhaps Mr. Seacroft can explain about one of the panel pictures in that quaint old room at The House on the Marsh? Edward has been talking to me about it"—with a glance and a blush, as she mentioned the name of the fortunate young man. "He insists that it is a perfect likeness of me, with the exception of the fancy costume, and I wish to know how such a thing could happen, when it was painted so long ago as he says."

"Merely a family portrait, and a resemblance," said Mr. Seacroft, before Mr. Alpine could reply. "She was undoubtedly a remote ancestor of yours."

The ringing of the supper bell at this moment, and the appearance of Mrs. Wigsmith broke up the conference.

In honor of the occasion the repast was prolonged much beyond the usual hour, the only drawback to their happiness being the absence of Mrs. Alpine.

Mr. Bookout, learning that she had excused herself with the plea of a severe headache, began to grow secretly alarmed, remembering as he did the symptoms of failing, and flagging energies he had noticed. His knowledge too—shared by no one present—of the great secret that was burdening her mind, gave him keen apprehension, and as the hours wore away he grew more and more uneasy.

Mr. and Miss Seacroft and their party had gone, and the household, with the exception of Mr. Alpine who had lingered in the library over his record, had retired.

CHAPTER XXXI. THE LAST MILE-STONE.

MR. BOOKOUT had withdrawn to the room set apart for him at the mansion; but he had no desire for sleep, and did not even remove his clothes, but sat down in a chair—not in a restful attitude, as one who seeks his ease—but with hands upon his knees, leaning forward with head erect and senses alert, as if anticipating some sound.

Thus sitting, his glances wandered up and down the carpet in front of him, as if he would trace out the intricate lines of its woven figures.

To one who had known him for a half century, the self-centered, self-contained lawyer, he could never have seemed less like himself than he did at this time.

He appeared the incarnation of repression, as if alert to keep back a host of hidden mysteries that were swarming to leap into instant activity and break out into revelation.

A full hour he sat thus, when the inevitable—which he could not retard, and yet for which he had not consciously waited—burst upon him.

Mr. Alpine—pale, disordered and in partial undress—suddenly appeared, a startling apparition, at the door. His lips moving, his hands shaking, and an open letter in his grasp.

"Mr. Bookout was on his feet in an instant, with one arm around his waist while his disengaged hand closed the door.

He did not even ask what it was that had happened. The convulsed appearance of his visitor told the worst.

"Dead," he asserted under his breath, while his strong frame grew rigid; and as Mr. Alpine sunk half-fainting into a chair, he opened the door, glided down the hall to where another ajar, and the lights streaming out, showed Mrs. Alpine's apartments, and went swiftly in.

She was sitting at an inlaid writing desk in a large arm-chair, one side of her face in shadow, her long beautiful hair rippling down around her, and her fair white arms, one hand still grasping a pen, hanging idly at her side.

To raise one hand quickly in his own, to feel for the pulse that had flown, and to strive to hear the beating of a heart whose work was done forever, were the instant efforts of the lawyer.

Gently he laid down the hand again, as he might have done that of a tired infant wearied out with play, and softly withdrew.

He returned at once to his chamber and found Mr. Alpine still struggling against the weakness of nature.

"Hopeless?" he breathed, as he scanned the lawyer's face—"hopeless?"

The voice of Mr. Bookout was firm, but gently modulated, as he responded:

"Yes."

Mr. Alpine still held the open letter in his grasp, and with one hand to hide his agitated face he held the paper toward the lawyer.

"Read it," he gasped, hoarsely—"read it."

Not as one who learns new tidings, but as one who sees confirmed something already known, Mr. Bookout obeyed.

It was as follows:

"MY DEAR HUSBAND: I call you such for the last time, for this is our last parting. When you shall have read this confession you will see that all is over between us. Do not search me out, for your future can have nothing in common with mine. With the knowledge which must come to you a fathomless gulf yawns between. Yet never were you dearer to me than at this moment, and never in the hereafter shall I know that peace which your dear love has brought.

"I am the wife of another! How I was married, and when, is of no importance here, or why my life was one long period of suffering and drunken abuse; it is enough to know that I suffered all that a woman can suffer and live, before I fled from the wretched place that I had called home.

"There are faults that can be borne, and excuses might be made for this, but there remains worse to be told. I deserted my children, yet not wholly or at once, and perhaps would not at all had circumstances been less inexorable.

"You recall the summer of your absence in Europe and the new companion of your invalid wife that greeted you on your return. You heard the story of her residence on the sea-coast, and you heard the story told at Mr. Bookout's office, of a girl-baby that was swept out to sea. That child—thus lost by the overturning of the summer-house was yours! The one that lies in Greenwood, whom you fondly believed yours, was mine, substituted, unknown to

the mother, to take the place of the one that was lost. You will understand now the likeness which you noticed between Grace Seacroft and your late wife.

"Oh, my husband, you can never know the struggle and distress of that bitter period; nor the anguish that the duplicity of my false position entailed upon me.

"For more than five years thereafter, the burden of my wretched husband was borne in silence, until at length, weary of it all, I deserted him forever, with a girl-baby in my arms. I had clung to him until he had become an outlaw by the murder of his uncle, when, driven to desperation, I gave away the child, subsequently losing all trace of it.

"When, ignorant of all these facts, you lifted me from the depths of despair to the haven of rest and tranquillity, making me your wife, I could not disturb the past by permitting it to break in upon your happiness.

"In later years, when Mr. Bookout brought us Iola, as a waif he had discovered, and you, with your great heart was so prompt to suggest her adoption—he little knew how quick to recognize her own is a mother's love. Iola is my child; a fact that may or may not have been known to Mr. Bookout. How she was found by him, or in what manner an overruling Providence gave her again to my arms, I know no more than you. It is enough to know that it was the only addition that could be made to my great happiness, all undeserved as it was.

"But we must part. The ghost of that dreadful past has risen again to torment me. My former husband still lives, and the sins of concealment are crushing me down. Farewell, and in the new lives of our innocent children, in their new happiness, may you be doubly blest. Time and weakness prevent my saying all I could wish, for I must prepare for flight, and—"

As Mr. Bookout read, the figure of Mr. Alpine had gradually sunk lower and lower in his seat, until he seemed almost a wreck, with his great heart crushed and broken.

The lawyer took his hand, which he clutched as a drowning man might cling to a rope thrown to save him, and rallying all his force of will he sat upright.

"Bookout," he said, "let the dead past bury its dead! Whatever she has done, she has made amends for all, God bless her."

"Amen," said Mr. Bookout, solemnly.

Without a word the lawyer turned to the gas-jet, and touched the corner of the paper to the flame.

It sprung slowly up and ran, a little margin of fire across the page—Mr. Bookout still holding it between them—while the two watched it slowly consume until the last fragment fluttered to the floor in ashes.

Not until then did the lawyer release his grasp of Mr. Alpine's hand.

Thenceforth the secret was their own.

The sad and sudden death of Mrs. Alpine following so quickly the happy event of the young people's marriage, created an unusual sensation in the fashionable world, and after the funeral was well over, Ned Alpine and his young bride went abroad.

Mr. Bookout sold his practice to younger lawyers, and joining Mr. Alpine they spent their leisure in local travel, getting a better knowledge of the interior resources of the country, and in some degree aiding in their development.

Grace Seacroft and her grandfather, having learned enough from Mr. Alpine of the story of the past to substantiate the claim made upon her as the daughter of Mr. Alpine, and the sister of Ned, went to reside in the Alpine mansion, in the intervals of her musical engagements—no longer wondering that she had felt so drawn toward Ned at the time she at first met him.

The money found on Owen, with the accompanying papers, disclosed the forgery by which it had been obtained and it was duly returned to Mr. Alpine.

The men sent down by Mr. Seacroft to complete the repairs on the old House on the Marsh, found in one of the long, lonely, lower rooms, a miserable apology for a bed, amid the rags and debris of which lay the wretched Hugh Wilkes, dead.

He was promptly buried by Mr. Seacroft.

The house, however, was never occupied, but took fire before the workmen completed their labors and was burned to the ground. The only regret expressed for the accident was that of Mr. Seacroft, for the loss of the panel portrait that looked like Iola, mingled, it must be said, with some satisfaction that that of his smuggling ancestor had shared the same fate.

Ned and Iola remained abroad one year enjoying such happiness in each other's society as true hearts only can know, and when they returned to take up their residence in the Alpine mansion they brought with them—

"Love's blessed gift,
Which her young arms could hardly lift"—
an immortal baby!—The most perfect and charming ever seen—so it was declared—with hair and eyes just like its mother's, and nose and willfulness exclusively its father's. With which admission in behalf of the superiority of womanly attributes, the author bids his readers a cordial adieu.

THE END.

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